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HISTORICAL CHRISTIANITY

H. Price Hughes

PREACHERS OF THE AGE



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Preachers of the Age

REV. HUGH PRICE HUGHES, M.A.





A. Price Hughes

ETHICAL CHRISTIANITY

A

SERIES OF SERMONS

BY THE

REV. HUGH PRICE HUGHES, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY," "THE PHILANTHROPY OF GOD," ETC.

" He's true to God who's true to man ; wherever wrong is done,
To the humblest and the weakest, 'neath the all-beholding sun,
That wrong is also done to us ; and they are slaves most base,
Whose love of right is for themselves, and not for all their race."

LOWELL.

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THIS VOLUME
IS
DEDICATED TO
THE SISTERS OF THE PEOPLE,
WHOSE LIVES ILLUSTRATE THE
ETHICAL CHRISTIANITY
IT ADVOCATES.



P R E F A C E.

NOTHING is more remarkable and, from one point of view, more encouraging than the fact that every attack which has been made upon the Christian religion has been founded upon a total misconception of its nature. In our own day a great many persons, both educated and uneducated, have imagined themselves to be opponents of Christianity. But when their arguments and denunciations are carefully examined, it is found that what they have rejected is some perversion or caricature. Nothing is more common than to hear persons talking about "giving up" Christianity who have never had any real Christianity to give up; or, to speak more accurately, who have never given up anything really Christian which they were fortunate enough to possess. A short time ago one of the great apostles of Positivism astonished mankind by announcing that he had been a Christian in his youth, and then proceeded with the utmost *naïveté* to disclose that by being a Christian in his youth he meant that when he was a boy he held certain metaphysical dogmas with respect to the creation of the universe and the nature of the soul! The most common delusion of clever persons who imagine that they have rejected Christianity, is to suppose that Christianity consists in a creed, and especially in the acceptance of certain

mysterious dogmas about which even Christian opinion is divided. It is really quite surprising that any one could honestly confound Orthodoxy with Christianity, because, as John Wesley used to say in his emphatic and decisive manner, you may be as orthodox as the devil and as wicked. Not that I in the least underestimate the importance of orthodoxy or correct thoughts with respect to spiritual facts. But every one ought to be aware that it is possible to receive dogmatic formulæ as a train of thought in the brain without experiencing even an infinitesimal trace of real Christianity.

I have said that the extraordinary delusion to which I have referred is, from a certain point of view, very hopeful. I mean that it would have been an exceedingly ominous thing if sincere and intelligent persons had really considered the claims of true Christianity and then rejected. What many upright and ardent souls have rejected is a misconception, a caricature, a subjective Christianity of their own, a traditional delusion which no more resembles real Christianity than the conventional Christ of the painted Church window resembles Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It is true that at this moment the great majority of the people of this country never go to any place of worship, and this is yet more the case on the continent of Europe. Does it in the least degree indicate that the masses of the European nations have weighed Christianity in the balance and found it wanting? Nothing of the sort. The overwhelming majority of them have not the faintest conception of what Christianity is. I myself have met a great number of so-called "agnostics" and "atheists" in our universities, among our working men, and in society, but I have never yet met one who had rejected the Christianity of Christ.

Many of the so-called unbelievers have a great deal to say about the horrors and iniquities of ecclesiastical history, the inconsistencies of Christians, and the immorality of some doctrines that have been held by sincere but ill-informed professors of the Christian religion. But all this is utterly wide of the mark. As the learned and now sainted Bishop Lightfoot was never weary of reminding us, Christianity is Christ. "One might have thought it impossible," he exclaimed, "to study with common attention the records of the Apostles and martyrs of the first ages, or of the saints and heroes of the latter Church, without seeing that the consciousness of personal union with Him, the belief in His abiding presence, was the mainspring of their actions and the fountain of all their strength." Precisely the same truth is taught by Dr. Dale in the invaluable and most timely work to which I refer in the thirteenth sermon in this volume. Exactly similar testimony might be quoted from the most remarkable work that ever proceeded from the pen of the late Cardinal Newman, his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. He proves to demonstration that the only possible explanation of the triumph of Christianity in the first centuries was the intense personal devotion of living Christians to a living Christ. On this point all real Christians of all schools are unanimous. But what opponent or critic of Christianity has ever so much as examined the personal testimony of all Christians to their personal union with Christ, and in numerous cases to their consciousness of that union?

Christianity aims at producing a particular kind of life upon earth, and it declares the only way in which that particular kind of life can be realized. What that kind of life is I have tried to explain in this volume.

I do not believe that there is any honest agnostic or unbeliever in the world who would object to the sort of conduct which is exemplified and advocated in these sermons. All the noblest unbelievers have now accepted the ethical teaching of Christ as the highest and best. We are agreed with respect to the practical result at which we ought to aim. Now, can that practical result be achieved on a large scale in any way except in the Christian way? We appeal to the tribunal of history and declare that Christ-like men and women can be produced only by Christ; and He Himself can produce them only by entering into living union with such men and women as are willing to receive the Christ-like life from Him. Therefore we Christians all agree with Bishop Lightfoot in the strong statement that "the core of the Gospel does not lie" in "the moral teaching and the moral example of our Lord. Its distinctive character is, that in revealing a Person it reveals also a principle of life—the union with God in Christ, apprehended by faith in the present and assured to us hereafter by the Resurrection." Nevertheless, it is of great importance that all men should clearly understand what is the nature of that Ethical Christianity which is the direct and inevitable fruit of vital union with Jesus Christ. What that Ethical Christianity is, this volume tries to explain.

HUGH PRICE HUGHES.

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CONTENTS.



THE CHRISTIAN EXTRA.

	PAGE
“What do ye more than others?”—MATT. v. 47	... 1

THE CHRISTIAN PROGRAMME.

“Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.”—MATT. vi. 10	17
---	----

THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION.

“Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”—ACTS ii. 17 33
--	-------------------------------

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY.

“After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them.”—MATT. xxv. 19 43
--	----------------------

THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP.

“Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.”—LUKE xiv. 33 59
---	----------------------

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE.

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”—REV. xxi. 1	... 71
---	-------------

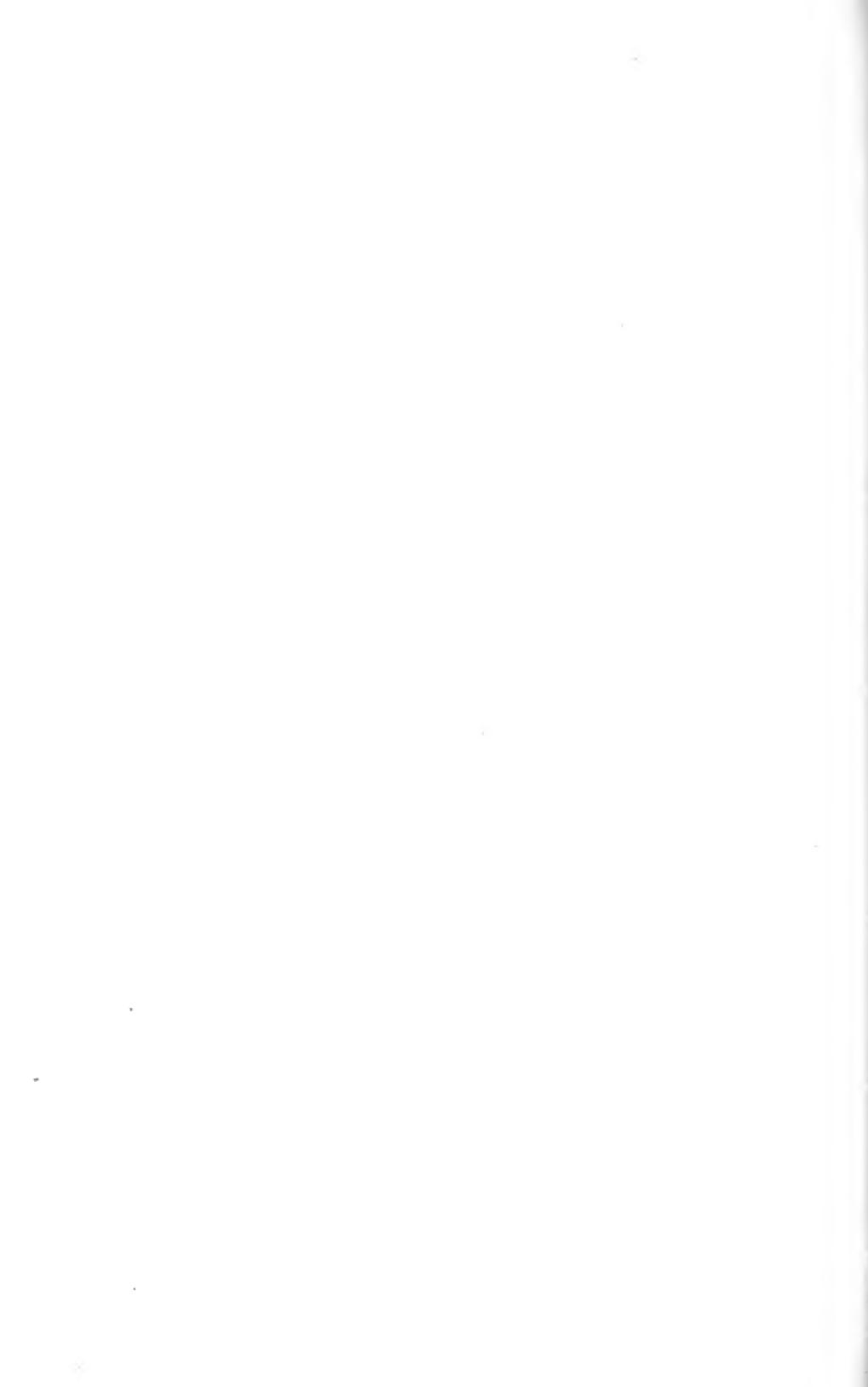
THE CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY.

“I also am a man set under authority.”—LUKE vii. 8	... 79
--	-------------

	PAGE
THE CHRISTIAN ARISTOCRACY.	
" Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."—MATT. xx. 28 93	
THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY.	
" The common people heard Him gladly."—MARK xii. 37 ... 105	
THE CHRISTIAN CHARITY.	
" To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."—LUKE xix. 9 117	
THE CHRISTIAN USE OF EVIL.	
" Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you [margin, 'obtained you by asking'], that he might sift you as wheat : but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not : and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren."—LUKE xxii. 31, 32 129	
THE CHRISTIAN ASPECT OF THE CENSUS.	
" When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel according to those that are numbered of them, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them ; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them."—EXOD. xxx. 12 141	
THE DECISIVE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.	
" Until the day dawn, and the Day-star arise in your hearts."— 2 PET. i. 19 155	
THE CHRISTIAN TRIUMPH.	
" Be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world."—JOHN xvi. 33 167	

THE CHRISTIAN *EXTRA.*

"To make some work of God's creation a little fruitfuller, better, more worthy of God ; to make some human hearts a little wiser, mansfuller, happier,—more blessed, less accursed ! It is work for a God."—CARLYLE.



THE CHRISTIAN *EXTRA.*

"What do ye more than others?"—MATT. v. 47.

"WHAT do ye more than others?" or, as the heart-searching question of the Great Teacher has been literally and skilfully translated, "What do ye *extra*?" Christianity is an "extra." Not a substitute for, but a supplement to every good thing already in the world. Christ came "not to destroy, but to fulfil"; to complete, to realize. Listen to His greatest apostle: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable" (or to be revered), "whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gracious; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."¹ That is a most comprehensive and exhaustive catalogue, claiming for Christian use and service every form of heathen goodness.

First of all, then, let us realize, acknowledge, and lay on one side every form of heathen, or, as we might better say, Gentile goodness. By this process of exhaustion let us discover the Christian "extra." For Christianity must possess something more than others, or be utterly discredited. Now, all that is best in the Gentile world may be summed up in

¹ Phil. iv. 8, 9.

two names, one European and the other Asiatic—Socrates and Buddha. John Stuart Mill, in his famous and ever-valuable essay on "Liberty," casually institutes a comparison between Socratic and Christian morality. He assumes that there is a contrast, if not an antagonism, between the ethical teaching of Jesus Christ and that of the great Athenian. He describes Christian morality as a negative and ascetic reaction from paganism. There could be no more complete and absolute delusion. In that statement John Stuart Mill totally misrepresents ethical Christianity. What was the Socratic morality, beyond doubt the highest "natural goodness" of Europe? The Socratic ethics are immortalized in the masterpiece of the golden thinker of Greece. We turn to the "Republic" of Plato and find that his moral teaching is summed up in the four cardinal virtues—wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Does Christianity reject any of these, or disparage any of these? Most certainly not. Christianity gladly accepts them all. Christianity declares that the man who is devoid of either of them is a most imperfect and unworthy Christian. But when any one professing and calling himself a Christian has accepted in their noblest forms all the great Socratic virtues, the question of Christ remains, "What do ye *extra*?" The slightest historic investigation will show that these great and manly virtues coexisted in Greece with slavery, militarism, and the subjection of woman—three particulars in which even John Stuart Mill would confess that the morality of Socrates was immeasurably inferior to the morality of Christ.

We turn now to the highest "natural goodness" of Asia embodied in the life and teaching of Buddha. Modern Europe realizes that Buddha was morally greater than Socrates, because he exhibited a gentle and gracious humanitarianism

to which Socrates was a stranger. Let us exalt Buddha as he deserves to be exalted, but he is still immeasurably inferior to Christ, Sir Edwin Arnold himself being our witness. His testimony is of peculiar value in consequence of his excessive adulation of Buddha in "The Light of Asia." He has done more than any one else to exalt Buddha in the affection and reverence of the modern world. But he has recently published another great poem, entitled "The Light of the World." In that volume, which is a poetic version of the life of Christ, he has made amends for his excessive adulation of Buddha in "The Light of Asia." Thoughtful Christians had a grievance against Sir Edwin Arnold, inasmuch as that exquisite poem was calculated to mislead the unwary. It would have been impossible for any man to write "The Light of Asia" who was not saturated with Christianity. The Buddha of the poem is a much better person than the Buddha of history. It is an idealized, a Christianized Buddha. In "The Light of the World" Sir Edwin Arnold refutes the error into which some have been betrayed by his extravagant praise of Buddha. By a very ingenious poetic licence he represents the wise men of the East, who visited the cradle of our Lord, as Hindu Buddhists. One of them is described as returning, in his extreme old age, three years after the Ascension of our Lord, to inquire what had become of the young King. He makes the acquaintance of Mary Magdalene. The greater part of the poem consists of an imaginary conversation, extending over a week, in which, in melodious language, she describes to him the principal events of the life of Christ. Now, the serious interest of this poem lies in the fact that from time to time Sir Edwin Arnold, who is one of the most careful and profound

students of Buddhism now living, puts into the mouth of the aged Buddhist confessions and acknowledgments of the superiority of Christ. He points out what truths Christ taught beyond those which Buddha taught. This testimony from Sir Edwin Arnold is intensely interesting, because, as I have said, he has done more to exalt Buddha in England and in Europe than any other literary man. Here, then, we have the apologist and the eulogist of the great Hindu paying his tribute to the superiority of Jesus Christ.

In the course of the poem he mentions at least four particulars in which Christ and His teaching are incomparably superior to Buddha and his teaching. The first is supposed to be uttered by the aged Buddhist—

“ Truly, nowise have we known before
Wisdom so packed and perfect as the Lord’s,
Giving that Golden Rule that each shall do
Unto his fellow as he would have done
Unto himself; for then this earth were heaven.”

That is the first evident superiority of the Christian religion. Its ethical teaching is plain and practical. There is much that is mystical and inscrutable in Buddhism. But any man who sets himself to understand the moral side of the New Testament need have no doubt as to what he ought to be or do. It is summed up in the profound but simple Golden Rule that you should do unto others as you would they should do unto you.

The next striking peculiarity of the Christian faith is expressed in the following words :—

“ Also, right joyous goes His doctrine ; glad
'Mid Life's sad charms and swift vicissitudes,
And Death's unshunned and hard perplexities
Which make us bear to live. But Buddha held
Life was long sorrow.”

To this Mary Magdalene replies—

“ Oh, good Friend ! that soul
Hath done with sadness which knows Christ aright.”

The second superiority of the Christian faith is its intense joyousness. Buddhism is a gloomy, ascetic, pessimistic religion ; a religion of despair, which, in answer to the question, “ Is life worth living ? ” says, “ No ! it must be devoted to getting rid of life.” What an unhealthy contrast to the true faith, which expresses itself in such words as—

“ My God, I am Thine,
What a comfort divine,
What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine ! ”

Then comes the third superiority of the Christian religion—

“ . . . Whence are words to thank
These words which teach me where thy Jesus filled
The leaf of wisdom in, and wrote for men
The name Lord Buddha would not say nor spell ?

Thou, reporting from thy Master’s mouth,
. doth inscribe
This mighty name of “ Love,” and biddest believe
Not law, not fate, not fore-ordinèd course
Hath moulded what we are, and built the worlds ;
But living, regnant Love.”

The Christian religion, instead of leaving the Ultimate Fact of the universe in darkness, in unspeaking mystery, tells us in plain words that It is not the Unknown, the Unknowable, or the Unspeakable, but a personal God whose nature is Love. He who has not yet realized the true significance of that Fact can have no conception what a revelation it was. Until Christ came all lands were wrapped in gloom. In Asia, as is the case to-day, men were in doubt whether there was a God or not, whether the ultimate cause of this

universe was a person or some blind, resistless force. Even those who believed in a personal existence had a terrible conception of the fury and ferocity of their God. Christ comes, and tells us that God is Love ! This glorious fact is the essential peculiarity of the Christian faith.

One more marked distinction between Christianity and Buddhism is uttered in the following confession of the Buddhist to the Magdalene :—

“Also, who enters—if I gather well—
 Into this kingdom, in thy Master’s train,
 Hath, for its secret, not to love himself ;
 Nor seek to save himself ; nor—lonely—wend
 Over dead duties and affections slain,
 Towards such Nirvâna ; but to cherish still
 His neighbour as himself ; and save his soul
 By losing heed of it, in heedful care
 That all his doings profit men, and help
 The sorrowful to hope, the weak to stand.”

Then he goes on to admit how immeasurably superior Christianity is to Buddhism, because it seeks the way to “selflessness”

“Not by hard stress of lone philosophies,
 Nor scorn of joys, nor sad disparagement
 Of life and living things as shadows vain ;
 But—nearer road, and new !—by heart to see
 Heaven closest in this Earth we walk upon,
 God plainest in the brother whom we pass,
 Best solitudes ’mid busy multitudes,
 Passions o’ercome, when master-passion springs
 To serve and love and succour.”

In other words, the Christian faith has for its supreme quality its social character. The pre-eminent purpose of the Christian man is not to save his own soul whatever may become of his neighbour’s. He realizes that it is impossible to separate himself from his fellow-men, and that there is

no way in which he can achieve his own salvation without achieving that of his race. Instead of gloomy asceticism which drives its victims from the ordinary intercourse of human society, he realizes that he ought to mix with men, enter into every healthy relation, and take his part in every activity of life, proving, as S. John said, his love to God by his unmistakable love to his fellows. These, then, on the high and impartial authority of the great writer I have quoted, are the four striking features in which our faith is immeasurably superior even to Buddhism—(1) The ethical teaching of Christianity is much more intelligible ; (2) it is not gloomy and pessimistic ; (3) it does not involve the nature of God in impenetrable darkness ; (4) it teaches that we are to save our own souls by saving our brethren.

Nevertheless there are profound truths in Buddhism, and Christianity accepts every one of them. Christianity claims all the Buddhist virtues, and then says, “What do ye extra ?”

So much for the best ancient systems of morality. Let us come now to our own doors. We find beautiful and touching “natural goodness” not only in the adherents of the ancient ethical systems of Europe and of Asia, but in the masses of modern heathen who are outside all the Christian Churches, and who make no profession of religion. Illustrations abound on every side. I recollect one which deeply impressed me some years ago. A drunken, rough, foul-mouthed navvy was at work in a railway cutting. Suddenly an express train rushed round the curve at a short distance from the spot on which he was standing. In a moment the navvy realized that upon the line there was a log which might turn the engine off the rails and sacrifice the lives of innocent men, women, and children.

There was not a second to be lost. The peril to himself was enormous. But without the least hesitation, he dashed upon the line, dragged away the log, and before he himself could escape was flung into eternity! Surely that was a most Christ-like act. He deliberately laid down his life a ransom for many. Yet he made no profession of religion, and was in no sense a religious man. Let us realize his heroic and disinterested self-sacrifice, and then listen to the great question, “What do ye *extra*?”

Let me mention only one other illustration of the splendid virtue sometimes exhibited by the utterly irreligious. A casual dock-labourer, after being out of work for a long time, secured a few days’ employment, and then, in order not to reduce by one penny the miserable pittance which would be available for his starving children, he himself went without food for three days while he toiled wearily on. On Friday afternoon he hastened to receive his pay, and as he was stretching out his hand to take it, he dropped down dead—starved in his desperate effort to obtain ample food for his little children. These Christ-like episodes are no embarrassment to Christians who believe that Christ lighteth every man that cometh into the world. But what a revelation they are of the amount of genuine—if occasional and intermittent—goodness outside the Christian Church! And what force and emphasis they put into the great question, “What do ye *extra*?” We Christians are bound to practise every virtue manifested both by ancient and by modern heathen, and then to supplement them all by some distinctive Christian quality justifying the supremacy which we claim for Christ.

But we have not yet exhausted the extraordinary significance of our text. It reminds us that we must

surpass Jewish as well as Gentile goodness. Let us, then, realize, acknowledge, and lay on one side the highest achievements of Jewish goodness. These are summed up in the Ten Commandments, which are immensely superior to anything that either Buddha or Socrates ever taught, because they place before the human conscience a plain and divine morality illuminated and vitalized by the service of the living God. In some respects the great Gentile teachers approximated to the second Table of the Law. But they taught nothing comparable with what was inscribed on the first Table. The superiority of the Jewish code is shown in the production of such glorious men as Isaiah and Daniel. But the great point which we have to remember is that we may be as good, not only as Buddha or Socrates, but even as Isaiah or Daniel, and yet not be truly and distinctively "Christian." When we have realized all that these great saints did, the question still remains for the humblest Christian, "What do ye *extra?*" Even the Ten Commandments, so superior to any Gentile code, are shown in the very discourse from which our text is taken to fall immeasurably short of the ethical standard of real Christianity. They fall short in two respects. First of all, they do not exhibit the inwardness of Christianity. In our code, to look after a woman lustfully or to think of a man murderously is to break the Law. Outward obedience does not suffice. The very thoughts of our hearts must be cleansed and brought into obedience to the captivity of Christ. Again, the Ten Commandments fall short of the outwardness of Christianity, because Christianity applies its moral precepts not only to our own kith and kin, but also to the entire human race. It is from the standpoint we have now reached that our Lord's extraordinary conversation

with the rich young ruler becomes intelligible. That gifted and devout young man had kept all the Jewish commandments from his youth up, and yet he was conscious that he lacked something. Then Christ said to him, "If thou wilt be perfect;" that is to say, if he wished not only to attain the highest Jewish goodness, but also to be a true Christian, a real disciple of Jesus Christ, he must do something which the Ten Commandments did not demand of him, and which, I may add, is not found in any ethical code except that which Christ taught and practised.

Now, what is this "extra"? What is the *differentia*, the distinctive note of Christianity? The plain answer is found where we should have expected to find it—in the writings of S. John. Addressing His disciples on the eve of the Crucifixion, Jesus Christ said, "A new commandment I give unto you." Ah! our long quest is about to succeed. Now we shall obtain an answer to the inquiry we have so often made. A "new" commandment; a commandment such as never fell from the lips of a great ethical leader before; a commandment in the teaching neither of Buddha, nor of Socrates, nor of Moses, nor of Isaiah. What is it? Let us continue the quotation: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another." That is not new! Love, pure, sweet, heavenly love, has existed in all lands from the very beginning. But we have not quite finished the quotation. Let us complete and ponder that great utterance: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, *even as I loved you.*"¹

Ah! the great secret is out at last! To be like Christ—to love men as Christ loved them—that is Christianity,

¹ John xiii. 34.

and only that. Now I can understand a remark which I heard some years ago in Scotland, and which perplexed me at the time. Referring to an earnest and distinguished Christian, one said, "He is a very good man, but somehow or other he does not remind me of Christ." I thought, "How strange! How can he be very good without reminding men of Christ?" I understand it now. He might have reminded them of Buddha, or Socrates, or Isaiah, or Daniel, but he did not remind them of Christ because his life was not an incarnation of disinterested, all-embracing love. So we come back once more to the conclusion we have often reached and as often forgotten—a real Christian is a Christ-like man.

Now, you call and profess yourself a Christian? If a religious census were tolerated in this country you would unhesitatingly enter yourself "a Christian"? What proof do you give of your Christianity? You pay twenty shillings in the pound? I am very glad to hear it. There are some who call themselves Christians and do not. You live a sober, chaste, and industrious life? So did Buddha. You tell the truth and are strictly honourable? Socrates might say the same. You go to the house of God, read your Bible, say your prayers? So did Daniel. You observe all the rites and ceremonies of your faith? So does the devout Mahometan. You give one-tenth and more of your goods to the service of God? That is most gratifying, for there is nothing that the conventional Christian neglects so much. But in this respect you are no better than the Pharisee. When you have exhausted the entire category of ordinary virtue the question still remains, "What do ye extra?"

Jews and Gentiles have done all these things, done them

honestly and devoutly. You have not yet given any evidence whatever of real Christianity. Let me put to you a decisive question : "Are you in any degree like Christ?" That is impossible as an habitual fact, unless you at least study His words and His life as keenly as a man of business studies trade returns, and as a politician studies the speeches of his political leader. Further, if you are to be a true Christian, you must accept Christ as your Teacher. You must acknowledge His infallible authority. You must apply His principles of conduct to every phase and aspect of life—to business, to pleasure, and to politics, as well as to prayer-meetings and sacraments. Once more, you must accept Him as your Teacher in the highest sense by making Him your Model. It has been well stated that Christianity does not say to us, "Sit and be convinced," but "Arise and walk." Christ does not undertake to satisfy our intellectual curiosity, but to direct our moral conduct. And unless we practise His moral teaching as far and as promptly as we apprehend it, we shall cease to understand it, and the light within us will become darkness. In a word, if you are to be a true Christian, you must place yourself unreservedly in the hands of Christ. To use His own striking and pregnant phrase, you must "abide" in Him "as the branch abides in the vine." With man this is admittedly impossible. But "with God all things are possible." This Great Renunciation, this unreserved and absolute self-surrender to Christ, is the very essence of true Christianity. Until we intelligently and heartily accept Him as our infallible Teacher, our all-sufficient Priest, our authoritative King, our very Life, we are Christians only in name and possibility.

It is because there are so few Christ-like Christians that

the majority of every nation in the civilized world is outside the Christian Church. This is why Christianity is almost stationary at home and abroad. What we want above everything is a few Christ-like Christians. I say "a few," because it is unreasonable to hope for very many at once, although all ought to possess the Christian "extra." But a few would save the Church. As Dr. Newman pointed out in one of the most famous of his university sermons, the real work of Christianity has in all ages been done by the few. John Wesley expressed the same great truth in memorable words when he said, "Ten true Christians would change the face of England." He meant ten thorough-going Christians, ten Christ-like Christians, ten men or women animated by the Christian "extra." Will you be one of the ten? It is an old Latin proverb that no one becomes very wicked suddenly. It is equally true that no one becomes very good suddenly. The sinner may be converted suddenly, as I myself have witnessed a thousand times. But a convert does not apprehend the Christian "extra" at once. I appeal, therefore, specially to those who have already repented of sin and trusted in Christ, and had some experience of the love of God. You are ready for the further and fuller consecration, for the higher and better life. Will you accept it now? Will you so give yourself up to Christ, that His spirit may reproduce in you the Christ-like "extra"—that disinterested, absolute, self-sacrificing, suffering, all-embracing love, which is the highest attribute of God, and the distinctive mark of the Christianity of Christ?



THE CHRISTIAN PROGRAMME.

“ Shall we never listen to the words of these wisest of men? Then listen at least to the words of your children—let us in the lips of babes and sucklings find our strength ; and see that we do not make them mock instead of pray, when we teach them, night and morning, to ask for what we believe never can be granted ;—that the will of the Father,—which is, that His creatures may be righteous and happy,—should be done *on earth*, as it is in heaven.”—RUSKIN.

THE CHRISTIAN PROGRAMME.

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth."—MATT. vi. 10.

THE text is taken from what is called "The Lord's Prayer." But that is somewhat of a misnomer. The Lord's Prayer is really found in the incomparable and unapproachable seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to S. John. The prayer before us is the Lord's Prayer only in the sense that it was taught by the Lord. Various attempts have been made to derive it from the Zendavesta on the one hand, and from the synagogue prayer-book on the other. But all these attempts have failed. There is no doubt that it is an absolutely original and unique composition of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so may be called His prayer. But it was intended for our use, and is appropriate for our lips and not for His own. This prayer has certainly been more frequently used than any other since the Christian era began. You and I have repeated it a thousand times. I greatly fear it has become a vain repetition. Too much familiarity with it has blinded our minds to its meaning, and deadened our consciences to its moral. Who of us really understands the petition I have just read? Who of us honestly desires its fulfilment?

In the first place, it teaches us the real aim of life—to

do the will of the Father. The most painful feature of the lives of most men is their aimlessness. They drift to and fro with the social current as seaweed drifts with the tide. This is, I fear, especially the case with those among us who are most privileged, and who are not under the blessed necessity of toiling for their daily bread. Have you ever gone into the Park at the height of the season and watched those weary faces? I believe that the reason why so many of the wealthy and titled plunge into all the follies and miseries of gambling is because they are at their wits' end to "kill time," to destroy the intolerable *ennui* of their aimless existence. Who that has a real purpose in life cares to waste hours at the gaming-table? But it is to be feared that the great majority both of rich and poor have no definite purpose here. Some of you will recall the poetry of unusual earnestness and loftiness with which Matthew Arnold was inspired when he visited the chapel at Rugby and remembered his noble father—

" What is the course of the life
Of mortal men on the earth?—
Most men eddy about
Here and there—eat and drink,
Chatter and love and hate,
Gather and squander, are raised
Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving
Nothing; and no one asks
Who or what they have been,
More than he asks what waves
In the moonlit solitudes wild
Of the midmost ocean have swell'd,
Foam'd for a moment, and gone.

" And there are some, whom a thirst
Ardent, unquenchable, fires,
Not with the crowd to be spent,

Not without aim to go round
 In an eddy of purposeless dust,
 Effort unmeaning and vain.
 Ah yes, some of us strive
 Not without action to die
 Fruitless, but something to snatch
 From dull oblivion, not all
 Glut the devouring grave !
 We, we have chosen our path—
 Path to a clear-purposed goal."

To which class do you belong? Are you in the number of those who spend their time in

"Striving blindly, achieving
 Nothing"?

Are you one of the crowd who

"... without aim . . . go round
 In an eddy of purposeless dust,
 Effort unmeaning and vain ;

or are you one of the noble few who strive

"Not without action to die
 Fruitless,"

who have chosen a path, a

"Path to a clear-purposed goal"?

The text teaches us that the "clear-purposed goal" of the Christian is to do the will of the Father. Christ was the Ideal Man, and the whole object of His existence was to reach that goal. "My meat," he exclaimed, "is to do the will of Him that sent Me."¹ And again, "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."² And again, "I am come down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. And this is the will of

¹ John iv. 34.

² John v. 30.

Him that sent Me, that of all that which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day."¹ You remember how at the crisis of His life he cried, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me : nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."² That bitter cry is a proof that it is not always easy and pleasant even for innocence itself to do "the will of God." Therefore if you sometimes find it hard and even dreadful to tread your way to this goal, you are only repeating the experience of Christ. Like Him you shall be made "perfect through suffering." But as a rule the healthy Christian, like Christ, "delights" to do "the will of God." Mark that phrase, "the will of God." We are here to do "the will" of God, not merely to obey "the law" of God. "The will of God" is necessarily very different from "the law of God." Even the Ten Commandments are a most imperfect expression of "the will of God." "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Law is necessarily expressed in general terms and in human speech. General terms never exactly suit every particular case, and human language has its inevitable limitations. Hence the old judicial proverb that the highest law is sometimes the highest injury. The strict letter of the law does occasionally frustrate the very purpose of the Lawgiver. Our Lord proved that again and again in relation to the sabbatic law. The terrible blunder of the Pharisees was to confound the "law of God" with the "will of God," whereas Christ ever interpreted the "law" in harmony with the "will." You remember how in relation to the literal observation of the sabbatic law, when the literal observation became a moral violation, Christ said, "Is not a man better than a sheep?" and with that one

¹ John vi. 38, 39.

² Matt. xxvi. 39.

question swept away all the cobwebs of interpretation by which the Jewish authorities had made the sabbatic law inconsistent with the goodness and mercy of God.

Precisely the same ethical principle must be remembered in discussing the temperance question of our own day. Nothing could indicate a more profound ignorance of the real spirit of the New Testament than an attempt to justify the use of alcoholic liquors because, forsooth, it is possible that Christ drank intoxicating wine at the marriage feast in Cana! What, in the name of common sense, to say nothing of scriptural morality, has that to do with it? We are no more required to imitate Jesus Christ literally in that respect than we are required to wear a turban and sandals because He undoubtedly wore them. To argue like that is to abandon the intelligent and humane morality of the Christian religion for the absurd literalism and inhumanity of the Pharisaic code. We might say again with Christ, "Is not a man better than a sheep?" or yet more pertinently, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" Our conduct in relation to the temperance movement and every other must be determined by the great principles of Christian humanity, and not by miserable wrangles over the meaning of words, or the personal habits of our blessed Redeemer under totally different social conditions.

But I refer to this question now simply as a modern illustration of the immense difference between every kind of narrow literalism and a rational loyalty to "the will of God." Even when we are dealing with the Ten Commandments, we must remember, as I have already said, that they are a most inadequate expression of the will of God. Our Lord pointed that out again and again, especially in the

Sermon on the Mount, where He shows specifically that the law against murder and the law against adultery fall immeasurably short of the requirements of ethical Christianity. Reflecting on these facts, I increasingly doubt the wisdom of printing the Ten Commandments above the communion table in our sanctuaries. It tends to drag down the Christian code to the level of Judaism. Would to God that every one who professes and calls himself a Christian honestly kept the Ten Commandments! It would be a great improvement on the existing situation. But, as a matter of fact, it is a very doubtful procedure to introduce the Ten Commandments into the Christian sanctuary. God requires of us a great deal more than He required of the Jews thousands of years ago, and there is some danger that the young and inexperienced should imagine that the Ten Commandments embody the ethical code of the Christian faith.

This objection becomes even more weighty when we notice that the prayer which Christ has put into our mouths refers not to the will of "God," but to the will of the "Father." We have not to do the will of the Creator. That belongs to the Gentile code. We have not to do the will of the Judge. That belongs to the Jewish code. We are called to do the will of the Father. That is the Christian code. In our sanctuaries a disobedient man is regarded not as a disloyal creature, or as a law-breaking citizen, but as a prodigal son. The profound and miserable error of the elder brother in the well-known parable was to regard himself as one simply bound to keep the "commandment" of his father, and under no obligation to do his father's "will." The true explanation of his hard-heartedness comes out in the words, "Lo, these many years have I served

thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of thine." When a son begins to talk not about the "will" of his father, but about the "commandments" of his father, he has already ceased to be a son in spirit; he has lost the filial attitude, and may well talk about "serving." For a servant he is, and no longer a son. It is to be feared that a great part of Christendom is still at the inferior Jewish level. We are too apt to think of God as a Master whose commandments we have to keep under threats of penalties. We do not realize that Christ has taught us in this very prayer to think of God as a Father whose will it is our noble and glorious privilege to do. And yet the language of the Lord's Prayer teaches us as emphatically as language can teach that the one divine goal of the Christian life is to do the will of the Father.

In the second place, the petition we are pondering teaches us that this "will" is to be done "on earth." Not in heaven, but on earth, here and now. Perhaps the most fatal delusion that ever took possession of the Christian Church was the delusion that the will of God cannot be done on earth, that the Christian ideal is too high for attainment here, that the programme which God has given us must somehow or other be explained away. When the first gush of love and enthusiasm began to ebb in the hearts of men, the idea grew up that obedience to the will of the Father was impossible in ordinary life; and it was assumed that it could be rendered only in the artificial life of a monastery. When that broke down, it was assumed that it could be accomplished only in the loneliness of a hermit's cell. When the Reformation took place, our forefathers were much too well acquainted with ecclesiastical history to be victimized by the old delusion that men or

women could live the ideal Christian life in a monastery or a nunnery or a lonely cell, better than in ordinary society. As a matter of fact, the purely artificial life of those monastic institutions was less moral and less satisfactory even than the conduct of average Christians in the ordinary relations of society.

The Reformers, deprived of that method of explaining away Christianity, found relief in another direction. They positively transported the sphere of ideal obedience into another world altogether! So it came to pass that both Catholics and Protestants concluded Christianity was too good for this world! Catholics, however, assumed that the ideal life might be led in monasteries or in solitary cells, but Protestants taught that the Christian life was possible only in Paradise. They boldly expelled Christ-like Christianity from this planet! They argued vehemently that man must sin, and Luther went so far as to contend that a certain amount of sin was an advantage because it taught men humility! The two extremes, both Catholic and Protestant, were due to the delusion which they shared, that Christianity was too good for this world. They said in effect, "We cannot do the will of God on earth in the ordinary relations of life;" and the one added that it might be done in monasteries and nunneries, and the other asserted that it was possible only in Paradise. Yet all this time they alike repeated the words, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." By our traditions on this subject, both Catholic and Protestant, we have explained away the New Testament as completely as the Pharisees explained away the Old Testament.

For example, S. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into

the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”¹ The ordinary modern Christian imagines without hesitation that this passage refers to heaven. I have often heard it quoted in prayer and in the pulpit in relation to heaven. But anybody who reads it with his eyes open will see that S. Paul is referring not to Christian experience in another world, but to Christian experience in this world, even in licentious Corinth itself.

But the most striking illustration of the strange perversion of Scripture now under our notice, is found in the last chapters of the last book of the New Testament. In the last two chapters of the Revelation, S. John describes the city of God. How many thousands of sermons have been preached about the city of God, and, so far as I know, in almost every instance it has been assumed that it is the city of heaven, and that S. John is describing what will take place on the other side of the river of death in the Great Hereafter! Yet, in speaking of the city, S. John describes it as “coming down out of heaven from God.” It would be impossible for him to declare more emphatically that he is speaking, not of heaven, but of earth; not of some mysterious place in another world, but of London, of what London ought to be, and what London will be when her citizens are Christians. The “great voice out of the throne” exclaimed, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,”² and we read that “the kings of the earth do bring their glory”³ into this city. But we have made the Word of God of none effect by our traditions. We have perverted the most obvious statements of Scripture until the book has lost much of its interest for the busy masses of men. This is the most dangerous form that

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

² Rev. xxi. 3.

Ibid. 24.

our “other-worldliness” has taken. We have deadened our consciences and paralyzed our energies by explaining away passages that refer to this present life, and by comfortably assuming that they describe what heaven is and not what earth ought to be.

What more startling illustration of this could we have than the Lord’s Prayer itself, which, strange to say, from beginning to end, makes no request whatever about heaven! If our only life were the life on earth, every petition of the Lord’s Prayer would still be appropriate for our lips. When Christ responded to the earnest request of His disciples that He would teach them how to pray, He gave them this brief and comprehensive litany. But, observe, He did not instruct them to offer one single petition in relation to heaven. He concentrated all their thoughts and all their requests upon the duties and privileges of this present life, and upon the necessity of doing the will of our Father “on earth.”

In the third and last place, He teaches us in the text how the will of the Father is to be done—“as in heaven.” That is to say, it is to be done on earth always, everywhere, by everybody. Mr. Herbert Spencer is quite right in his statement that we have at present two religions in this country. One which we derive from the Old and New Testaments, and one which we learn from the Greek and Latin authors. One which for the most part we only “believe that we believe,” and the other which we do unmistakably believe. One which we profess on Sunday, the other which we diligently practise during the rest of the week. Nothing is more curious than the way in which men seem to divide their lives into water-tight compartments like the different sections of great steamers, so that one part of their nature

has no connection whatever with another part. The singular story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is founded upon a great psychological truth. Most men live double lives, and this duplicity is summed up in two leading particulars. First of all, how often do we hear sincerely religious men say that "religion is religion and business is business"! By which they mean that the principles they profess on Sunday are not applicable to the details of their business life on Monday. We may be sure that if Jesus Christ had to address the good men who do not apply their Christian principles in the City and in the West End, He would speak to them in some such terms as these : "Ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" This attempt to establish a kind of water-tight compartment, in which under the stress of modern competition we are to do a hundred things inconsistent with Christianity, is as diametrically opposed to the spirit of Jesus Christ as it is fatal to the well-being of mankind. We can never be said to do the Will of our Father on earth as angels do it in heaven, if we do that Will only at certain times and in certain places. Ruskin is quite right in stating that if our religion is good for anything it is good for everything.

The second way in which some very imperfectly instructed Christians contradict the Lord's Prayer, is by asserting that "religion has nothing to do with politics." They try to construct a political as well as a commercial water-tight compartment. That is the reason why the manhood of Europe has been alienated from the Christian religion. A profound instinct has taught the masses of the people that if Christianity is not applicable to politics, Christianity is an antiquated delusion. Principles which cannot be obeyed by Society as well as the Individual are

obviously so imperfect and so unsatisfactory, that the sooner we are rid of them the better. The distinction which is so commonly made between secular and sacred is a deadly anti-Christian delusion. There is not a single passage in the New Testament which justifies a man in acting upon different principles on Sunday and on Monday. The petition which we are now considering, and which Christ has put into every Christian mouth, compels us to acknowledge that there is only one rule for the Christian under all circumstances, and that he is under a divine obligation to act upon Christian motives and considerations in business, in pleasure, and in politics, as well as in prayer-meetings and at sacramental services.

Have you ever realized how far S. John has carried this secular conception of the Christian programme? In the ideal picture of the city of God he actually exclaims, "I saw no temple therein."¹ Think of it! A Jew said that. A Jew who had been accustomed to regard the temple as the very heart and centre and crown of his own great city. But in the ideal city of God to be erected on earth, John saw "no temple." Religion, which in olden times had been restricted to certain places and certain days, and certain occasions and certain ceremonies, had in that glorious vision become so extended and pervasive and all-embracing, that there was no special building for divine worship. But every house was a house of prayer; and in these houses, consecrated to God, the men were virtuous, the women brave, and the children happy. It would have been impossible for a Jew to bring home to us so vividly in any other way his own deep sense of the fact that the Christian religion was to be a religion of common

¹ Rev. xxi. 22.

life, and that its greatest triumphs were to be won, not in far-off regions where sin had never wrought its fearful havoc, but on the very spot where evil had once triumphed. The ideal of the eternal love of God is to be attained in the very world where Satan tempted, where man sinned, and where Christ died. The will of the Father is already done by angels in heaven. The Lord's Prayer is a prophecy and a promise that it shall yet be done on earth.



THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION.

“The virtue of the Imagination is its reaching, by intuition and intensity of gaze (not by reasoning, but by its authoritative opening and revealing power), a more essential truth than is seen at the surface of things. . . . It has no food, no delight, no care, no perception, except of truth; it is for ever looking under masks, and burning up mists; no fairness of form, no majesty of seeming, will satisfy it; the first condition of its existence is incapability of being deceived.”—RUSKIN.



THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION.

"Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."—ACTS ii. 17.

THESE words from the pen of the Prophet Joel were declared by S. Peter to refer to the Christian era, which was finally inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost. The marked characteristic of this era is that those who promote and represent it have visions and dreams of an ideal state of happiness unattained but attainable. Instead of accepting the existing situation as unchangeable, instead of submitting to evil as inevitable, Christian men have visions and dreams of a Golden Age in which sin and evil and sorrow shall be no more. It has often been remarked that one of the most striking differences between Christianity and the classical religions of the south of Europe which it superseded, is that they placed their Golden Age in the dim and receding past, but Christianity places its Golden Age in the bright and advancing future.

Some years ago Professor Tyndall delivered a remarkable address on the use of Imagination in Science. He showed that this great faculty of the soul was simply invaluable in a sphere of thought where superficial minds would suppose there was no scope for its exercise. If I remember rightly, one of his illustrations was the Luminiferous Ether

which no one has ever seen, or heard, or felt, which is a pure conception of the Scientific Imagination, but which is now assumed to be a fact because its hypothetical existence explains the phenomena of colour more fully and more perfectly than they have ever been explained before. Ruskin has in noble passages descanted on the use of the Imagination in Art. In his vocabulary as in that of Professor Tyndall the word is redeemed from all low meanings. It represents not mere and groundless imaginings, but ultimate realities. Students of Wordsworth will remember that great poet's description of unimaginative Peter Bell—

“A primrose on the river’s brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And nothing more.”

Whereas to the imagination of Wordsworth even the humblest flower discloses

“Thoughts too deep for tears.”

Indeed, it may be said that artists have two divine functions. The work of painters, poets, sculptors, musicians is first of all to reveal to us the hidden meanings and beauties of all that is—the Actual. As that great artist Browning has so finely said—

“Art was given for that ;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. . . . This world’s no blot for us,
Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.”

But artists have an even nobler function. It is the mission of the greatest and best of them, secondly, to reveal the glory and blessedness of that which may be—the Attainable.

Now the faculty of the soul which apprehends the Beatific

Vision both of the Actual and of the Attainable, is the Imagination. This great faculty reaches its maturity and achieves its noblest deeds in the service of religion, when purified and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Then it sees visions and dreams dreams of "whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him."¹ My theme, therefore, is the use of the Imagination in Religion, where its services are even greater and more necessary than in the spheres of Science and of Art. It is to this faculty of the soul that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers in his famous eleventh chapter. You will observe that he there defines faith to be "the essence of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen." That is a very comprehensive and abstract definition which includes a great deal more than saving Christian faith. I trust you all know full well that saving Christian faith is a personal trust in a personal Saviour. But this writer gives us a much wider and more general definition of faith. "Faith" in his vocabulary expresses what I call "Imagination," the realizing of "things hoped for" and "things not seen," the Attainable and the Actual.

It was this Imagination which enabled the great saints whom he marshalls before us to do their mighty deeds. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and all the prophets "saw visions and dreamed dreams." They were not deceived and paralyzed by "the things which are seen and temporal." With the eye of Faith or Imagination they saw "the things that are unseen and eternal," and in the strength of that Beatific Vision they accomplished gigantic moral revolutions which lifted the whole human race to higher levels of goodness and of happiness. The men of the Christian era

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

and their great Master possessed this faculty of Imagination in the highest degree. S. Peter, in his Second Epistle, had a vivid and overwhelming vision of “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”¹ He imagined this world, and even heaven itself, renewed, exalted, beatified! S. Paul, again, dreamed dreams of the glorious Golden Age when “in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth.”² His fearless and irresistible imagination traversed the whole universe of God, and imagined it all subject to the sway of Jesus Christ. I need not enlarge upon the presence and exercise of this quality in S. John. His apocalyptic vision of the earthly City of God closes and crowns the Revelation.

But it may be necessary to remind you that this great faculty existed in the most vigorous and vivid form in the Master Himself. When the seventy evangelists returned with their artless story of spiritual triumph, His eyes flashed and He exclaimed, “I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven.”³ His imagination was so alert and so penetrating, that in the first feeble triumphs of His emissaries He saw the promise and potency of the restitution of all things. Again, certain Greeks came to one of His disciples and said, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” When that request was conveyed to Him He exclaimed exultingly, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.”⁴ To His lofty imagination that little group of obscure Greeks was the advance guard of the southern races of Europe, of the Teutonic tribes, of the great Churches of our own time, and of the greater Churches not yet born. Christ, indeed, lived habitually in

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 13.

² Phil. ii. 10.

³ Luke x. 18.

⁴ John xii. 31.

the Unseen. He realized always that Great Future when His disciples would sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and when all the Gentiles would be subject to His sway.

There is nothing which ordinary Christians lack so much as this inspired Imagination. They do not see visions. They do not dream dreams. You and I have probably been too hard upon them. They have not lacked, as we have been tempted to believe and say, religion or faith, but—imagination. We have been indignant and angry at their parochial ideas, at their grovelling hopes, at their small satisfactions, at their dwarfish ambitions. But they have not been unreal or unbelieving. Their dull, undeveloped souls have not realized the divine possibilities. There are human moles that burrow and grope in the darkness of narrow boundaries, of subterranean passages; and there are human eagles that spurn the low earth and soar aloft into the bright sunlight. Only eagles can see the vast horizon of life and beauty. Are you a mole or an eagle? Do you belong to the class of Christians whose imaginations have never been roused and exalted by God, or to those who see visions and dream dreams of glorious spiritual victories?

The ordinary Christian, with his unsanctified imagination, is not perturbed by a half-empty sanctuary, or by a Christian Church that is more dead than alive. He has no enterprise. He has no enthusiasm. He holds that as it was in the beginning, or is now, so it must be for ever and for ever. He is indignant with his brother-Christian whose imagination enables him to realize a spiritual prosperity yet unattained. The imaginative Christian sees the sanctuary crowded with healthy, happy, united Christians. He sees

all the great revivals and spiritual miracles of the past repeated under his eyes. The unimaginative Christian is affronted by such visions. He regards the man who cherishes them as a dangerous "visionary," a foolish "fanatic," a reckless "enthusiast." The real difference between these two men is not that one is a Christian and that the other is not; but that one has the eyes of his imagination opened, while the other is still blind.

Again, in civic life the ordinary Christian citizen is well satisfied if he discharges his own commonplace duties to the rate-collector and to the municipal authorities. But the Christian citizen whose imagination is inspired of God dreams of social changes which would make it as easy for his fellow-citizens to do right as it now is for them to do wrong. What a dream of social reform has come to General Booth in his old age! That veteran of the faith imagines social arrangements which will abolish pauperism, and all the world wonders. There is no sphere of life in which there is more scope for the imagination than in civic life. Only at present there is no sphere in which it is so little exercised. Nothing could be more dull, narrow, and brutish than the ordinary conception of municipal life in our great towns. Only here and there do municipal authorities begin to realize how much could easily and cheaply be done to beautify life, to ennable it, to instruct and inspire it; and, on the other hand, to repress both hideousness and vileness. Some day Christians will see visions and dream dreams of a noble and glorious citizenship. Then the voice of complaining will no longer be heard in our streets.

When we rise to the sphere of patriotic or national life we find the noblest scope for the Christian imagination. The real patriot is ever dreaming of the good time when

men will dwell together in peace and brotherly love. Think of the glorious vision of peace which came to Isaiah! He dreamed of the nations "beating their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks," and not even "learning war any more." The dull, stupid man of the world says that war is "inevitable." This ignoble sentiment is not due to the fact that he is bloodthirsty, but to the degraded condition of his imagination, which has never been roused by the touch of the finger of God.

O, how shall we kindle the imaginations of men! Nothing is so much needed to redeem life from its smallness, its narrowness, its abject impotence. Read Isaiah, read the Revelation, read the four Lives of Christ, and first of all realize this very hour what Christ can do for you. Young men! see visions of a noble and beneficent career! Old men! dream dreams of a life not wholly lost, of much that may yet be done for God and for humanity! How glorious it is when young and old thus combine in anticipating, and therefore in promoting, the Kingdom of God which shall yet be established upon earth! How delightful when the daring and ardent vision of youth is corrected and extended by the peaceful and serene dream of old age! Every one, at every period of life, may cherish the Beatific Vision of the Christian world, the "new earth" that is to be. Only so shall we rise above the tyranny of the past and the despair of the present. Things are not as they seem. Ancient evils are already tottering to their fall. "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Nothing is too hard for Him. The only real hindrance to the progress of His kingdom is to be found in the narrowness of our thoughts and in the parochial smallness of our enterprises. Only let us emulate the sublime faith and

the inspired imagination of the great men who founded the Baptist Missionary Society. Let us, like them, "ask for great things," and "expect great things." According to our divinely inspired Imagination it shall be done unto us.

THE
CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY.

“ What are you doing in God’s fair Earth and Task-garden ; where whosoever is not working is begging or stealing ? ”—CARLYLE.

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY.

"After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them."—MATT. xxv. 19.

THE parable of the Talents has made so deep an impression upon the English conscience that it has added a new word to the English language. We speak of "a talented man," or of "a man of talent," by which we mean one possessing some special ability. It is obvious that in these familiar expressions the word "talent" has lost its original meaning, and has acquired a parabolic meaning as some special endowment. But although we have naturalized the word in this parabolic sense, it is not the correct parabolic sense. That is to say, it does not convey as it ought to convey an idea of special responsibility for the use or neglect of special endowments. The employment of this word is a striking evidence, as I have said, of the impression which the parable of the Talents has made upon the English mind. But the erroneous sense in which it is employed indicates that the parable is not yet commonly understood. This is much to be regretted as there is nothing which the modern Englishman needs to realize more carefully or more deeply than the essential warning of this parable—the warning which is expressed in the text.

The framework of the parable before us is furnished by a familiar custom of men of property in ancient times. When they went away from home it was their habit to leave their property in the hands of their servants, or rather their slaves, who represented every occupation of life. Some of these slaves were merchants, some were mechanics and artisans, some were professional men, and some were farmers. Now, the owner in the case before us distributed his wealth among his slaves, "to each according to his several ability;" that is to say, to each according to the ability which "severed" or distinguished him from his fellow-slaves. In this sense the statement in the American Declaration of Independence is profoundly true, "All men are born free and equal." They are free and also "equal" in the sense that each receives "talents" appropriate to his "ability." In another sense they are not "equal," for we come into the world with an incalculable variety of abilities. The abilities with which we are naturally endowed may be classified in various ways. Perhaps there is no better method of classification than that which distributes them according to our threefold nature. We have physical ability, mental ability, and spiritual ability.

Men come into this world with great varieties of physical ability. Physical ability itself is twofold—muscular and nervous. The muscular strength of our bodies, as we know, varies very much. Some are exceedingly strong, have never an ache or a pain, and are capable of prodigious efforts. Others are scarcely able to make any physical effort whatever. Again, the nervous system is quite distinct from the muscular, and does not necessarily vary with it. Some who have a comparatively weak

muscular development have a magnificent nervous system. On the other hand, some muscular giants are of a low and coarse nervous type.

Secondly, we are endowed with great varieties of mental ability. Some men are literary, some are artistic, some are scientific, some have a great aptitude for business, and others are evidently called to play a distinguished part in politics or public affairs.

Again, it is equally evident, however much it may shock some antiquated notions, that our spiritual ability varies greatly. Some persons are much more amiable than others, and find it very much easier to keep their tempers and to treat every one with kindness. We may even go further, and say that some persons are by nature much more spiritually-minded than others. The devotional side of life comes more easily and more naturally to some of us than to others.

Now, the great Master teaches in the parable before us that He distributes talents, whatever they are—we shall see presently—to each of us “according to our several ability.” It does, indeed, often seem to us that a round peg is put into a square hole, and that it is the exception rather than the rule to have “the right man in the right place.” But we must believe, on the authority of this parable, that for the highest of all ends our Lord overrules all things, so that every man has the “talents” of which he can, at present and under existing circumstances, make the best use. Please to observe the limitations in that statement—“at present” and “under existing circumstances.” Notwithstanding, therefore, the disadvantages of birth (which are now felt more keenly than ever), and the fact that in this sense “all men are” not “born equal,” we are justified in

drawing the optimistic conclusion that God in His overruling providence so orders our circumstances that every man, in this probationary life, does receive the "talents" which accord with his abilities physical, mental, and spiritual.

But it is high time for us to ask, What are the "talents" thus distributed? As I have already explained, in common speech we use the word in an obviously erroneous sense. "Talents" have come to be synonymous with "abilities." When we talk of "a man of talent," we mean a man of ability. But this is evidently a mistake, for in the parable before us we are told that God distributes to us talents according to our several ability. Hence, if the word "talents" be understood to mean, as is commonly assumed, "ability," we should read God "distributes ability according to ability," which is absurd. No! talents are not abilities. They are evidently the *Opportunities* with which the abilities do their work. I have just classified our abilities under three heads. We may now classify our talents or opportunities under four heads. There are four kinds of talents.

First, Money. When we become the owners of wealth through no merit or effort of our own, we receive a great talent or opportunity. Even when we have done something ourselves to obtain wealth, and when we can honestly regard it as in some degree the reward of our own industry, the case is not so entirely different from inherited wealth as at first appears. When we penetrate beneath the surface of things, and inquire more particularly what are the circumstances which occasion the accumulation of wealth, we shall find that the millionaire who has apparently made his own money is much more indebted to the industry of his neighbours and to favourable circumstances than he is to his own ability. Let him transport himself, like Alexander Selkirk,

to a solitary island, and try to make a fortune there. Then, when he has utterly failed, let him acknowledge that he owes even more to others than he does to himself for the money he has accumulated. Money, both inherited and accumulated, is a great talent or opportunity. Nothing astonishes me more than the fact that so many rich men utterly fail to realize what an opportunity wealth gives them. They go on heaping up useless wealth with which to curse their children. As though the mere accumulation of money was in itself a great gain ! As though heaps of gold could protect them against all the ills to which flesh is heir ! I am very glad that one millionaire—Mr. Carnegie, of Pennsylvania —realizes that the best thing he can do with his money is to get rid of it, and that the worst thing possible would be to pile it upon the hapless heads of his children. There seems to be in some respects even less public spirit among the wealthy men of our own time than distinguished the heathen patricians of old Rome. They delighted to spend their wealth in dignifying and adorning that great city. It is exceedingly surprising to me that the immensely wealthy citizens of London do not use their millions to purify and to beautify this great capital. It is even more astonishing that those who profess and call themselves Christians toil on and slave on, adding money-bag to money-bag, instead of using this mighty instrument to facilitate and encourage the evangelization of mankind. Nearly every Christian and humanitarian organization is crippled for want of more adequate resources. One of the greatest evils of the time is the miserliness of the wealthy. They are preparing for their children an awful retribution. The bitter and almost implacable hatred of the wealthy, which is the most dangerous social symptom of modern Europe, is the direct result of

the awful way in which the wealthy have neglected to use their wealth for the public good. They are busily heaping up wealth, but they are also heaping up wrath against the day of wrath. They seem to have forgotten that wealth is a talent, an opportunity, a glorious opportunity of serving God by serving man.

The second kind of talent or opportunity, is Rank. This, like Wealth, is not to be despised or under-estimated. If rightly used, it may be made a most potent instrument of human happiness. It is difficult to exaggerate what Rank could do in an ancient country like this if all who possessed it realized that it was a responsible opportunity.

The third great talent is Education, now happily within the reach of many, destined soon to be within the reach of most, and ultimately of all. In some respects true Education is a greater talent than either Wealth or Rank. It is a source of illimitable influence, and may be used as a mighty and almost irresistible weapon in the warfare against evil.

There is one other kind of talent expressed by the significant phrase, "Openings in life." These opportunities are not altogether reserved for either Wealth, or Rank, or Education, but in the mysterious providence of God come to most men—tides that suddenly flow, and which, "taken at the flood," lead on to highest service.

Now, these four things, Money, Rank, Education, and "Openings in life," are the fulcrums of our levers, and tools with which we work. The purpose of God with respect to the distribution of these talents or opportunities is expressed in the famous maxim which more than anything else explained the triumph of the first Napoleon, "The tools to the man that can use them." I have already admitted that it does not always or even often seem that this is the rule. Talents,

or opportunities, not seldom appear to be given to the very man who cannot use them. But we are bound to conclude, on the authority of One "to whom all hearts are open, and all desires known," One who understands man better than man understands himself, that these talents or opportunities are after all distributed in the way which, if each man is faithful, will at present and under existing circumstances secure that they shall be best, because most effectively used for the general advance and well-being of the human race.

The real reason why these talents or opportunities often appear to be given to the wrong person is because those to whom they are given do not improve them. Of that we have startling evidence in the remaining part of the parable. But first of all we deal with the case of the "good and faithful servant," the man who makes the best use of the opportunities which God has given him. Of him we read that he "went and traded with the talents, and made other five talents." That is to say, he made the very most of his talents; not of one of them or of some of them, but of all of them. He lived up to his opportunities, and you will observe that we are told he did this "straightway" (ver. 16). That word is a happy improvement of the Revised Version upon the ambiguous "then" of the Authorized Version. "Straightway," that is, at once, without any delay, beginning early and working late. Whatever he might have achieved by desperate efforts in the later period of his life, it would have been impossible for him to make the best use of his talents if he had thrown away his youth and early manhood. Thank God, men may be "saved" at the very end of their life. But we dare not conceal from such persons that their late decision is a sorry business at best. They can never redeem the neglected opportunities. They can never gain

back the lost occasions of highest service. None are "good and faithful" in the best sense of the term except those who "straightway," from the very first and perseveringly, trade with the talents placed at their disposal.

We come now to our text, where we read that "after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them." Every one of us must stand before His judgment-seat, and there He will make a careful, deliberate, and exhaustive "reckoning" with us. He will inquire concerning our abilities. First, our physical abilities, what kind of bodies we had, and whether they possessed muscular ability or nervous ability, or both. Then He will inquire into the precise nature of our mental ability, whether it was literary, artistic, scientific, commercial, or political. Lastly, He will investigate our spiritual ability, considering whether we possessed any natural amiability or any special disposition to the more spiritual side of life. Having exhaustively "reckoned with" us respecting our abilities, He will inquire what were our talents, our opportunities of using those abilities. We shall have to give an account of every penny that ever passed through our fingers. Our position and influence in the social hierarchy will be carefully noted. The exact nature of our education will be the subject of investigation, whether we received an elementary, a secondary, or a university education. Then all the openings in life that came to us will pass under review. Not one of them will be overlooked.

Are you startled or shocked by this plain matter-of-fact statement? Does it seem to you scarcely consistent with the dignity of that august tribunal? Are you not rather the victim of your own sentimental mysticism? Have you not been living in some theological cloudland of your own

invention? Pray consider the situation with becoming gravity, and tell me whether any other method of investigation would be consistent with justice. There are the Abilities which distinguish one man from another. There are the Opportunities which in various ways are granted to us. Surely those are the Facts upon which the verdict of the Final Court will depend.

And now, if you prove to be "a good and faithful servant," one who makes the most of his abilities and his opportunities, what will be your reward? You will be invited to "enter into the joy of your Lord." And how will you enter into the joy of your Lord? By being "set over many things." His is the joy not of idleness, but of work. Heaven, thank God, is not a Palace of Indolence, but a hive of glorious industry; and the reward of worthy service will be not eternal self-indulgence, but larger responsibilities, wider spheres of usefulness, and greater opportunities of making others happy.

You will further observe that the servant who by trading made five talents into ten, and the other who made two talents into four, received precisely the same reward. This is obviously just, for each was equally faithful according to his ability and opportunity. The sphere of work assigned to each in heaven will be according to his capacity. Every man having his most appropriate sphere, all will be equally happy.

We must turn now to the slothful servant. It is a typical story. Listen to it. "Lord, I knew Thee that Thou art a hard man, reaping where Thou didst not sow, and gathering where Thou didst not scatter: and I was afraid, and went away, and hid Thy talent in the earth: lo, Thou hast Thine own."¹ The unfaithful man is always full of

¹ Vers. 24, 25.

excuses. As is said in the truthful French proverb, "He who excuses himself, accuses himself." You will observe that he accuses his circumstances, his fellow-men, his God. According to his own miserable story every one is to blame except himself. See how God takes him at his word, and shatters his refuge of lies. "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter: thou oughtest therefore to have put My money to the bankers, and at My coming I should have received back Mine own with interest."¹ In other words, God at least expected His own with "usury," or rather "interest." If he had not the ability or opportunity to do as the others had done, and to employ his talents in trading, he might at any rate have deposited the money in a bank at interest. In other words, if any man is incapable of original and heroic service, he can at least join the Christian Church and do something under the direction of others. The fact that you are unable to do what John Wesley did is no reason why you should not do something.

And now what was the punishment, the inevitable punishment, of the slothful servant? First the loss of the talent which had been placed at his disposal. The opportunity of service was taken away from him. And surely George Eliot was right when she said that there is nothing in human experience more dreadful than to think of opportunities of serving those we love that we have wantonly thrown away for ever. The second punishment is the "outer darkness," expressing the fact that he is self-exiled from the society of Christ, the service of Christ, and the happiness of Christ—the happiness of doing good. For

¹ Vers. 26, 27.

him nothing remains except "the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." The weeping of speechless misery and the gnashing of teeth caused by the knowledge that his terrible fate is the result of his own deliberate folly and wickedness, It is self-inflicted. It is suicidal. No other is to blame for it. From first to last it is his own wilful and absolutely unnecessary act and deed.

We are now in a position to sum up the solemn moral of this parable. It teaches us, as I said at the outset, our responsibility. No lesson could be more timely. As Mazzini reminded Europe half a century ago, we have heard enough of the Rights of man so fiercely announced at the French Revolution, it is time for us to realize the Duties of man. An eminent British statesman announced long since in Parliament that "property has its duties as well as its rights." He was speaking simply of property in land. But the parable before us teaches us that land is only one form of property. The healthy body, the intelligent mind, the spirit conscious of God, wealth, rank, education, openings in life,—all these things are also property to which is attached responsible duty, and for which every one of us shall give a strict account at the judgment-seat of Christ. These abilities and these opportunities are ours, not for self-assertion, or self-aggrandizement, or self-indulgence, but for the service of man. Shakspere has taught in noble words that man is responsible for the humane and gracious use of his great gifts.

"What is a man,
If his chief good, and market of his time,
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
Sure, He that made us with such large discourses,
Looking before, and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused.'

And again—

“ Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves.”

And again—

“ Spirits are not finely touched
But for fine issues : ”

Surely, in the light of the parable we have now considered, such truths as these have a tremendous significance. It is impossible to exaggerate the gravity of the fact that the only sin laid to the charge of the unhappy man before us was his unprofitableness. He was not a drunkard, or a gambler, or a cheat, or a blasphemer, or an impure man. In all the relations of life, as usually understood, he was innocent and blameless. But he was unprofitable. He did not use his abilities and opportunities to glorify God by promoting the well-being of man. He left the world in the world's debt. He lived as though he belonged to himself, and was under no obligation to use his abilities and his opportunities for the good of others. He never realized that he brought nothing into the world, and would take nothing out of the world except the solemn and awful responsibility of his trusteeship. Therefore when the Great Lord of that man “reckoned” with him, it appeared that he had left the world no better than he found it. So he was inevitably condemned, and he passed into the outer darkness, where are the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

On the other hand, how unutterably consoling it is to remember that nothing more is required of any of us than that we should be “faithful”! God knows our abilities and our opportunities, and all that is asked is that we

should make the most and best of both. We cannot promise to be rich, or clever, or eloquent, or successful as the world counts success. But, according to our several ability and opportunity, we can be "faithful"; and if faithful we shall taste the joy and share the throne of the Son of God Himself.



THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHP.

“ Yea, thro’ life, death, thro’ sorrow and thro’ sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed :
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning ;
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.”

F. W. H. MYERS.



THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHP.

" Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple."—LUKE xiv. 33.

PARTY-POLITICIANS too often try to adapt their programmes to the tastes and prejudices of the electors. False prophets in all ages make plausible and bewitching promises to catch the popular ear. But Jesus Christ, at the very height of His popularity, checked and discouraged the enthusiasm of the crowd, by claiming, as a *sine quâ non*, the complete renunciation of everything. Descartes demanded as the first condition of true philosophy that we should make a clean sweep of all our beliefs and start afresh. Jesus Christ demanded as the necessary preliminary of true discipleship that we should renounce all that we have, and place ourselves unconditionally and absolutely in His hands. As we read in the twenty-fifth verse, "great multitudes went with Him." At the very moment when the great tide of popular enthusiasm was setting in His favour, He turned round and said to them, "If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own father, mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."¹

The key to this hard saying is evidently the word "disciple," To be a real "disciple" of Jesus Christ

¹ Ver. 26.

clearly means a great deal more than to be a "Christian," in the low conventional sense of that much-abused word. There is probably no word in the English language that is more misunderstood. There are a great many persons, including some of our most eminent journalists, literary men, and authors, who actually imagine that to be a Christian is to hold certain controversial and metaphysical opinions! They constantly and unhesitatingly confuse Christianity with mere orthodoxy. Whereas, to use the plain but decisive language of John Wesley, you may be "as orthodox as the devil himself" and as unworthy of the great name of Christian.

An intelligent gentleman, who had been for many years a communicant of a great Christian Church, tried to persuade a young friend of mine the other day that to be a Christian is "to believe in God and to do what you think is right." Why, that definition of Christianity does not attain the moral level even of Mohammedanism. A devout Mohammedan would confess that true religion consists not in doing what you think is right, but in doing what God thinks is right. The man who uses such a definition, even though he has been a communicant for years, has not even entered the kingdom of God much less become a disciple.

To be a "disciple," as I have said, evidently implies being something more than an ordinary Christian. You may notice a significant change of expression between the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh verses. In the twenty-sixth verse the Great Master says, "If any man cometh unto Me," that is for pardon, he must do certain things if he would "be My disciple." And then in the twenty-seventh verse He further declares that he who would

be a true disciple must "come *after* Me," that is to say, must imitate Him, which is a very different thing. To come "unto" Christ is one thing, to come "after" Christ is another and a much greater thing. No man can come "after," or literally "behind," Christ who does not "bear his own cross."

Have you ever come "after" Christ? Do you say to me to-day, as some Greeks said to the disciples of our Lord two thousand years ago, "Sir, we would see Jesus"? Why do you desire to see Him? What do you want? Do you want to be saved from hell? Poor wretch! Poor wretch! Why, the very devils desire that, and would be glad enough to escape from their place of doom if it were possible. Is this your idea of Christianity—to be saved from punishment? Why, that sentiment is shared by the most degraded of criminals. If I went to the great convict establishment at Portland or at Dartmoor and said that the gates were open and that every convict who wished to avoid punishment was at liberty to leave, the huge and hideous building would be empty in a few minutes. There is no trace of goodness in that desire.

But perhaps you say, "O! I want more than that. I want to be admitted into heaven when I die." Poor wretch! Poor wretch! All the base, the vulgar, and the cruel share that desire; for the word "heaven" in such a sentence simply means freedom from pain and sorrow, together with plenty of pleasure. Every scoundrel echoes that aspiration.

But you say, "O! I want more than that. I want to be absolved from sin, to be forgiven, to escape the pangs of a guilty conscience, to drink some Lethean draught which

will enable me to forget the horrible past." That is well. That is not so unworthy. But it is a very negative desire, and is intensely and most unattractively selfish.

"I want more," you add. "I want to be saved from sin." That is better, much better, very much better. But it is still a purely selfish wish. Your thoughts, your hopes, your aspirations, still revolve in an exceedingly narrow, self-centred, and self-limited sphere.

"I want to be saved from sin in order that I may be able to help Christ in saving my neighbour from sin." Ah, we are now entering the pure air of heaven ! I hear in the distance the songs of angels ! Your face is beginning to be lit up with the glory of God ! Now, for the first time, you have said something which seems to indicate that you would fain be a "disciple" of Christ. For what, let me ask, is a "disciple"? A disciple is one who shares the thoughts, imitates the deeds, walks in the footsteps, and continues the work of his Master. But if all you desire is to escape from hell, you cannot thereby be a disciple of Christ. He has no desire to be saved from hell. He is not in danger of hell. Again, if you can say nothing more than that you wish to be admitted into heaven, there is still no trace of discipleship here. Christ has no such desire. He is in heaven. Heaven is His own place. Again, if you wish to be forgiven, that is a sentiment which you cannot share with Christ who has never done anything that needs forgiveness. Once more, if your aspirations do not extend beyond a wish to be saved from your sin, you are still in no sense a disciple of Christ ; for He never had that desire, having never known sin. But the moment you desire to co-operate with God in saving your neighbour from sin, you have "the mind of Christ." You desire now to share the work of Christ.

You are beginning to be a "disciple" of Christ. I do not for a moment deny that the lower motives are legitimate, and indeed a necessary part of a sinner's repentance. But they fall far short of Christian motive, and can be in no sense a feature of Christian discipleship. The Christian disciple is animated by an unselfish and God-like hatred of evil as evil, and an intense desire to abolish it from the earth. Now, if we are to be Christians at all is it not best to be thorough-going Christians, to be Christ-like Christians, to be His real disciples? What an accursed thing is half-heartedness! How misleading it is! How much worse than useless!

What is involved in being a Christ-like Christian? Two things, which Christ expressed in parabolic form. If you are to be a Christ-like Christian, you must first build a tower, and secondly, go forth to war. That is to say, you must build up a Christ-like character, and secondly, you must fight to the death against the devil and all his works. But before you do this, says Christ, "count the cost." Do not take a leap in the dark. Do not make the Great Renunciation until you realize all that it involves. Do not assume the sublime and awful title of "the disciple of Christ" until you understand what it means. It means, let me repeat, first of all a God-like, that is to say a Christ-like, life here—not hereafter, but here; not in the Third Heaven or even in Paradise, but on earth, and everywhere on earth. Consequently Christian discipleship means irreconcilable and implacable war against every form of evil. What does this involve? In the first place, says Christ, it involves being misunderstood and persecuted by your own family, especially if your family is a Christian family. No one dislikes the intense, enthusiastic, aggressive, Christ-

like Christianity so much as your commonplace, smug Christian. You see it is such a painful, irritating reflection on him. The unconverted man rather appreciates it. He likes a Christian to be a real Christian, an unmistakable Christian, a thorough-going Christian. Even if he has no desire to be one, he honours the consistency and the courage of the disciple of Jesus Christ. But the half-hearted, lukewarm, inconsistent, worldly, self-indulgent Christian is particularly embittered by the spectacle of a Christ-like Christian, whose very existence condemns him so much by exposing his unworthiness so vividly. On the other hand, the disciple of Christ must positively "hate," must utterly loathe the selfishness and the worldliness of half-hearted Christianity. His foes are therefore "they of his own household." Christ has come in this sense, as He Himself declared, "not to send peace, but a sword." He introduces terrible but inevitable strife and division into families ; and it is the painful experience of nearly every fully consecrated Christian, that when he wanted to give himself up wholly to God those who offered the bitterest opposition were his nearest and dearest relatives.

Again, if you would be a true disciple, you must hate not only the half-heartedness of your fellow-Christians but also your own life. You must make an absolute self-surrender to Christ. You must imitate Him, as He Himself declared, by reproducing His meekness and lowness : His meekness the opposite of self-assertion, His lowness the opposite of self-trust. The finest lines that Tennyson ever penned are two which occur in his dedication of "In Memoriam" to Christ. Addressing Him Tennyson says—

"Our wills are ours, we know not how ;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."

Truly; we cannot solve the problem of free-will. We cannot say "how" we are morally free. Let metaphysicians who have no better occupation for their time continue to waste their lives in useless cogitation and strife. We do know that we are free, and "why" we are free. We are free in order that we may willingly and gladly place ourselves at the absolute disposal of Jesus Christ.

In the third place, we must, as we read in the text, renounce "all that we have." We must place all our property, material, intellectual, and spiritual, in the hands of Christ. In a word, we must put ourselves and all we possess as absolutely at the disposal of Christ as the Jesuit puts himself at the disposal of the general of his order. Unless you do that you cannot be a "disciple" of Jesus Christ.

But you may say, "Is it right for me to make such an absolute self-surrender." I answer unhesitatingly, "Most certainly not, unless Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God." It is degrading and horrible beyond description to make so absolute a self-surrender to any fallible and sinful man. But if Christ is what He claims to be, this self-surrender is perfect freedom and glorious privilege.

You say that you are a disciple of Truth. But Jesus Christ is the living Truth, and every other truth is but an echo and shadow of Him. You say you seek the highest Good and the perfectly Right. Both combine absolutely in Christ. You say that you devote yourself to the Beautiful. But Christ is essential Beauty. In Him all ideals are realized. In Him every object of desire is perfected. All legitimate pursuits are summed up in Him. And the profoundest instinct of every human heart finds its complete satisfaction in worshipping Jesus Christ with absolute devotion.

But perhaps you further say, "If this is right, is it possible?" I answer at once—not in your own strength, but in the power of God. Not by processes of ratiocination but by divine illumination do you realize the claims and the all-sufficiency of Christ. Neither by sacraments nor by syllogisms are men saved; but by abiding in Christ. No man was ever argued into real Christianity, and no man was ever argued out of it. But when Christ is pleased to reveal Himself in us as He did to Saul on the dusty road to Damascus, we cry out, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" When we say that, we have already begun to be "disciples" of Jesus Christ.

I have enlarged upon the difficulties and the sacrifices of this Great Renunciation. I have quoted terrible language to illustrate the privations and sacrifices, the misunderstandings and controversies, to which the disciple, like his Master, is exposed. But I must not close without pointing out the result of discipleship. We have counted the cost, but it would be unfair to end without also counting the gain. We have enlarged upon loss, but something must be said of profit. What is that?

It is only recently that I have realized the close logical connection between this chapter and the beautiful and familiar fifteenth chapter which immediately follows it. When Christ spoke of discipleship, "all" the publicans and sinners gathered around Him, and in explanation of their presence He told the threefold parable of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Money, and the Prodigal Son, or, as we should rather say, the Loving Father. Why was that fact brought into such close connection with the text? In order to remind us that if the disciple has to make the Great Renunciation which the Master made, he shall also

receive the Master's reward, and like the Master be "wise to win souls." He shall

"Minister to the mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory its rooted sorrow,
Rase out the written troubles of the brain,
And cleanse the stuffed bosom of the perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart."

You are full of the enthusiasm of humanity? You are ardent for social reform? You desire improvement, remembering that "the soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul"? Well, there is only one great Teacher who can "improve" the soul. The power to convert a sinner from the error of his way, to save a soul from death, to cover a multitude of sins—that is the secret and the monopoly of the Great Master. And to be able to do that is the divine reward of discipleship. Without making the Great Renunciation you may be very orthodox, you may be learned in the Scriptures, you may be famous. But there is one thing you cannot be. You cannot be a winner of souls; you cannot point to men and women who through your instrumentality have been turned from darkness to light, and from the bondage of sin to the freedom of the sons of God.

On the other hand you may be poor and obscure and ignorant, you may speak with a faltering tongue; but if you have made the Great Renunciation, if you have become a true "disciple," then you shall be taught the secret of the Lord, and shall experience the divine and unspeakable happiness of saving men from sin. That is the reward of discipleship; and it is a reward so great that all who have received it deem the richest prizes both of the Church and of the State as dross and refuse in comparison with it.

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE.

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward;
Never doubted clouds would break;
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph;
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

BROWNING.

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth."—REV. xxi. 1.

THAT was the last vision of the last prophet. From the days of Abraham and Job, over a period of nearly two thousand years, God had frequently lifted up the veil of the future, and revealed to the purged eyes of His prophets "the things that should come to pass." From age to age the vision of the Coming Joy grew brighter and brighter and brighter. The last of the long succession of inspired seers was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the last of his visions was "a new heaven and a new earth." That burst upon his view nearly two thousand years ago. There has been nothing since, because there can be nothing greater or better than that. The long panorama of the Divine Programme was completed at last. "He that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."¹ That was the explanation of it. The Carpenter of Nazareth, the Son of man, the Son of God, who rose on Easter Day, is bringing it to pass. That was what the Resurrection signified. The empty sepulchre was the pledge of that.

What does it mean? "A new heaven!" What is that? We know very little of the old heaven. But it would seem

¹ Ver. 5.

that heaven itself was blessed by the Resurrection as well as the earth. There are vague and mysterious statements in the writings of S. Paul about benefits won by the Cross of Christ for angels as well as for men, for the whole universe as well as for this little planet. But that is an unexplored region of thought, and no man can explore it yet. It is well for Christian ministers to confess that there are some things in the Bible which they cannot explain, and which they do not understand. But I think we may venture to advance one step, and to say that when this relation of the death of Christ is explained, it will remove many difficulties about the Atonement which sometimes trouble our ignorance now.

But a “new earth”! We can understand that. Indeed S. John himself confines his attention and his description almost exclusively to that. All that even he can tell us about the new heaven is that the city of God “comes down out of” it from God to be established on earth. For the rest, he devotes all his time and all his strength to describe the “new earth,”—and so the Bible ends.

If any one should say to us, “What do you Christians mean by your outbursts of Easter joy,” we would answer, “We mean that a revolution has begun beside which the French Revolution and all other revolutions are child’s play. We mean that a day is coming when this world will be so changed, and so changed for the better, that its happy inhabitants will have forgotten how to weep.” “God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.” What do you think of that? This is a vale of misery now. Our poets are poets of sorrow. All our newspapers are written within and without with mourning and lamentation and woe. But a day is coming on earth—mark that! on earth—when

there shall be “neither mourning, nor crying, nor pain.” All these dark things are passing away, and the Risen Son of God is making all things new. Ah! little did men know what that Syrian Carpenter was doing. As Sir Edwin Arnold has reminded us in his latest poem the Divine Peasant once saw all the glory and corruption of the Past, when for a brief day He trod the streets of Tyre. Little did her merchant princes realize Who stood silent and watchful in the midst of them!

“Now, go by
Those thrones of Tyre—the old ill deeds and days—
Heedless and unaware ! seeing Him gaze
Wistfully from their Temple steps. No thought
How the mild eyes and silent steps have brought
End and beginning !”

Yet hath come the End !
Hath dawned Beginning !”

Yes! the real End and the true Beginning. “The End” struggles still, nineteen centuries later, with voice and pen and arm, pleading for lust, for pelf, for privilege. But it is smitten with a deadly disease, and all its apologists and advocates do but prolong the agony of its dying. “The Beginning” waxes more and more. Voices of humanity are heard on every side. The rights of man as man, the rights of womanhood, the rights of little children, the very rights of dumb animals, are championed and vindicated now! Even the ancient glories of war are beginning, in the new daylight, to look tawdry and rotten! The last are already first, and the “common people” are climbing the thrones of power.

Let us pause and ponder what it all means. There are nine ancient social evils—

Drunkenness,
Lust,
Slavery,
Ignorance,
Gambling,
Pauperism,
Disease,
Crime, and
War.

To these our special national wickedness has added three more—

The opium trade,
The torture of dumb animals, and
The sale of spirits and gunpowder to savages.

All these twelve colossal evils are marked for destruction as a woodman marks the trees that are to be cut down. The Resurrection means that they are all to go, to go absolutely, and to go for ever. In a word, the Resurrection means that there is no such thing as “a necessary evil.” Whosoever uses that phrase deliberately, whether on the platform or in the pulpit, proclaims himself a child of the devil and a son of perdition. That phrase is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. It asserts in effect that the Holy Ghost is so impotent that the devil must triumph for ever over the Son of man! God forbid that you and I should ever pollute our lips with that fiendish expression except to spue it out of our mouth with loathing and horror! All sin and all misery, the shadow of sin, are to be abolished from the earth. The day is coming when justice and love and peace will reign with unchallenged supremacy in every land; and when men will literally do the will of God on earth as angels do it in heaven.

From this great and hopeful fact we may, we must, draw two conclusions. First of all, sin need have no more dominion over us as individual Christians. We are not obliged to sin. I have this week heard one of the most beautiful and delightful incidents of my ministry. Some months ago a young Cambridge man, the eldest son of a distinguished dignitary of the Anglican Church, came to St. James's Hall, and afterwards reported the result to his mother. He said that he could not remember my sermon, but it had fully convinced him that it was "not necessary" for him to sin. O, blessed result of Christian preaching ! May God grant me many such results as the highest possible reward of sincere, however unworthy, service ! I cannot imagine anything nobler or more hopeful than that every young Englishman,

"The heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time,"

should realize that it is not necessary for him to sin, but that if he trusts in Christ he may be kept from sin, and by the grace of His Holy Spirit may walk in His footsteps and carry on His work until it is completed.

The second conclusion is this—having by faith in the omnipotent love of God achieved our own redemption, we must work hard for the redemption of the race. The first condition of highest success is that we should fully realize the gospel of the Resurrection. No compromise with the devil. That is the main point. It is much, very much, to have brought your own mind to regard all evil as an unnatural anomaly, a monstrous anachronism. You will then eagerly join the irreconcilable revolutionists of Jesus Christ. No incident in the history of modern Europe is more thrilling or more significant than the fact that when

the dissolute and tyrannous empire of Napoleon III. was at the height of its apparent prosperity, there were three Frenchmen who maintained in the National Assembly—the only spot where freedom of speech was still tolerated—an irreconcilable opposition. In vain did Napoleon and his sycophants attempt either to bribe or to bully these three men. They pleaded fearlessly, incessantly, passionately, for truth, for freedom, for justice, and the conscience of France responded to them so profoundly that the moment the tide of war turned against Napoleon the Empire fell for ever. It seemed for a long time as though it were a hopeless duel of three men against all the resources of France. But the three were faithful to duty and to one another. They did not count their adversaries. They were outvoted again and again and again. But they always returned to the conflict. Every day they renewed their demand for right. And so at last they won, and won a decisive victory.

We are not in such a minority as they were. If we do not paralyze our strength by useless and scandalous divisions, we can soon become, if not a majority, at least a dominant minority. In any case, if those three men defied the Empire in the name of patriotism, surely we may defy all social wrong in the name of God and Humanity. Let us be brave. Let us be outspoken. Let us be absolutely irreconcilable. The hour of deliverance is at hand. Inspired of God, we already see the new earth which S. John saw; and Christ helping us, we will do all that in us lies to hasten the coming of the blissful day when that glorious vision will be an accomplished fact.

THE CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY.

"Obedience is our universal duty and destiny ; wherein whoso will not bend must break ; too early and too thoroughly we cannot be trained to know that Would, in this world of ours, is as zero to Should, and for the most part as the smallest of fractions even to Shall."—
CARLYLE.

THE CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY.

"I also am a man set under authority."—LUKE vii. 8.

THIS verse has often perplexed me. I have found it difficult to expound in harmony with the context. The usual explanation is, "I am a man set under authority. Thou art not set under authority. Therefore, if I can say to this man, 'Go,' and he goeth, and to another, 'Come,' and he cometh, much more, *à fortiori*, canst Thou employ others to do Thy bidding." But this ordinary interpretation is flatly inconsistent with the employment of the word "also." "I also am a man set under authority." The word "also" prevents us from assuming that the centurion is contrasting his case with Christ's. It compels us to believe that he is referring not to a difference but to a similarity. One recent expositor makes a desperate effort to escape from this difficulty by saying that "set under authority" means "set with authority." But that will not do at all. We cannot cut the Gordian knot in this reckless fashion. It is not only most reverent, but most rational always to assume that a speaker in Holy Writ meant what he said, and that the difficulty is rather in our apprehension than in any assumed inability on his part to express himself correctly and intelligibly.

In this case I must believe that the centurion meant

exactly and precisely what he said. He had carefully watched Jesus Christ, and observed that He "also," that is to say, Jesus Christ as well as himself, was "a man set under authority." Christ always and openly recognized the authority of His Divine Father. He was not lawless, self-assertive, insubordinate. He was one of a great social hierarchy of authority and order; an officer of high rank, obedient to all above Him and to all divinely appointed or divinely tolerated authority; but at the same time having many subordinates under Him. The centurion in like manner was an officer in the great military hierarchy of Rome. He, therefore, concluded by analogy that as he, in his official hierarchy, acted through others, so could Christ.

My main point now is the fact that Christ "also," Christ as well as the Roman officer, was "a man under authority." Doubtless to the Roman officer He was no more than a man—one of the greatest and wisest and best of men, but still a mere man. The centurion had probably never realized that He was also the Son of God. To him Jesus of Nazareth was literally "a man set under authority." But it is only as Son of man that Christ is an example to us. The centurion's limitation of view, therefore, does not in the least degree hinder the lesson which we derive from Christ's recognition of authority. On the contrary, it brings the lesson within the range of practical life.

Nothing is more certain than the fact that Christ was "under authority." In the first place and supremely, as I have already intimated, He was under the authority of His Divine Father. He said, "I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." On another occasion He declared with passionate earnestness that

"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." Again, in the strongest terms He asserted, "The Son can of Himself do nothing." And once more, "I can of Mine own self do nothing." He recognized the absolute authority of the Father so completely that it seemed to Him morally impossible to speak or to act except in conscious obedience to the Father's will. We have all heard and read of the tragical moment in dark Gethsemane when His breaking heart cried out, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Even the cup of unspeakable and unimaginable agony He will drink, and drink to the dregs if the Father will. Thus at the close of His life He was able to say literally, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." Not the work which He had chosen for Himself, but the work which the Father had chosen for Him, which He began to do with eager intensity even in His very boyhood, and which He continued to do until it was perfectly "finished."

Now, in all this He has "set us an example that we should walk in His steps." To all of us in the Great Invitation He says, "Take My yoke upon you." That is, not a yoke which He imposes, but a yoke which He bears. He says, "Share My yoke with Me. Be My yoke-fellow." The yoke to which He refers is the yoke of absolute submission to the authority of the Father. He illustrates this at once by naming the two moral qualities which are essential to such submission. "I am meek and lowly in spirit." His meekness was the opposite of self-assertion. His lowness was the opposite of self-reliance. Never for one moment did He forget that He was under the authority of God. He did not please Himself. He did not even try to do the work of God in His own way.

He was here simply and solely and at all times to obey the Father, and He was "obedient even unto the death of the cross."

For us the case is a little changed. At the close of His life He said, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth."¹ Consequently we recognize the authority of the Father by recognizing the authority of the Son. Christ sits upon the throne of the universe to-day, and the "Father hath given all judgment unto the Son, that all may honour the Son even as they honour the Father." It is for us to submit to the authority of the Father by submitting to the authority of Jesus Christ. This fact greatly simplifies and lightens our duty. It is much easier to understand and to obey an incarnate God. "Clouds and darkness are round about the Eternal."² He dwells in light unapproachable. Him no man hath seen, nor can see.³ We are overwhelmed and perplexed in His presence. But when He appears among us in the gentle and homely guise of the Man of Nazareth we are reassured. We can understand Him better. We can obey Him more easily. This, then, is our duty—to obey Christ. We are "set under" His authority as He is "set under" the authority of the Eternal. Have we realized that?

The age in which we live is one in which the principle of Authority is in great danger of being despised. It is always an exceedingly difficult problem to adjust an exact balance between Authority and Freedom. In former ages, even in so-called free countries, the balance has inclined far too much in the direction of Authority. Now, for the first time, there is in some directions an opposite danger.

¹ Matt. xxviii. 18.

² Ps. xcvi. 2.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

Freedom is apt to be confounded with lawless licence. All of us do not realize that true freedom is freedom to obey those to whom obedience is due. An extreme reaction from the tyranny of the past has affected even our relations to God. I realize more and more that the secret of very much of our Christian unrest and failure is imperfect submission to Jesus Christ. The very essence of real Christianity is absolute, unconditional, uninterrupted self-surrender to Jesus Christ.

Our obedience to Christ ought to be as prompt, as unhesitating, as the obedience of the Roman legionaries to their officers. It has often been noticed that some of the most beautiful manifestations of faith in the New Testament were on the part of Roman soldiers. Their military discipline had taught them obedience. They were "set under authority," and they had no difficulty in submitting themselves promptly and heartily to the authority of Jesus Christ. Nothing is more urgently necessary than that we Christians should obey the "Captain of our salvation" as promptly and as loyally as every German soldier obeys the young German Emperor who has just visited our shores.

Why is Germany at the head of the world to-day? Because the whole German nation has accepted the principle of Authority. One hundred years ago they were a mob, and French armies rode rough-shod over them. They were reduced to the lowest straits of national helplessness and humiliation. Slowly they "learned obedience," and discipline, and the habit of acting together. Therefore when the great crisis came they repelled the French invaders by whom they had so often been trampled under foot, and they placed Germany at the summit of

human affairs. It is true that Freedom has been unduly sacrificed in Germany to Authority, and that consequently desolating militarism has dimmed the light of the German universities, and paralyzed the ancient civic freedom of the German race. But that, we may hope, is only a temporary evil, however great. In any case that is an abuse, an exaggeration, a corruption. It does not invalidate the force of the illustration. It does not in any way contradict the fact that the principle of authority is mighty, and that submission to authority is a necessary condition both of freedom and of progress.

At this moment the Christian Church in this country is to a great extent paralyzed in its aggressive enterprises because it is a mob rather than an army. We are fatally divided. We are too much in the chaotic condition of the ancient Israelites in the time of the Judges. Every man does "what is right in his own eyes." We need to be drilled into swift instinctive obedience so as to stand shoulder to shoulder, and to make an irresistible united attack upon all the forces of evil.

Oh that we had something of the sublime courage and unhesitating devotion to duty which animated the Light Brigade at Balaclava !

"Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die."

Why should men render to their human rulers and to military authorities an obedience more prompt, more self-sacrificing, than that which they render to Christ ? The social evils that desolate and decimate our race are ancient, wealthy, and gigantic. But we could scatter them like chaff before the wind if we had the necessary self-suppression and disciplined obedience to reasonable authority.

The one secret of the Salvation Army is the reassertion of the principle of authority. I do not say that we can all approve of that principle in the precise form in which it exists in the Salvation Army. But General Booth has made the same great discovery that Oliver Cromwell made at a crisis in our national history. There was endless talking, and committees were perpetually sitting and wrangling and doing nothing. It was high time that some strong and devoted man should take the matter into his own hands and invite his fellow-Christians to submit themselves willingly to authority, in order that organized co-operation might effect what lawless individualism, however sincere and however enthusiastic, was absolutely impotent to achieve.

There is no way in which our want of discipline is more painfully illustrated than in the long delays which frequently occur before any combined attack upon evil is made. S. Paul urges us to have our "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." But most Christians go about unsandalled, and when the bugle-call of duty is heard, they have to spend so much time in looking for their military sandals, that the golden opportunity is past before they are ready. Oh! the miserable hesitation, the disastrous delay, the slovenly negligence, the wretched half-heartedness, with which so much of the work of the Christian Church is nominally done but really undone! What a contrast is frequently presented between the way in which soldiers act, or the way in which men of business in their great enterprises act, and the way in which the work of the sanctuary of God is done!

And yet the very word which we employ to describe the most sacred services of the Christian Church ought to remind us perpetually of the great truth which occupies our thought

now. We call the initiatory rite of the Christian Church the “sacrament” of Holy Baptism. We call the supreme and perpetually renewed act of Christian worship the “sacrament” of Holy Communion. Sacrament! what is that? It is a Latin word, *sacramentum*, and it means the oath of military obedience which was taken by every Roman soldier—the oath in which he swore loyalty to the Emperor, and declared his readiness to go anywhere, to do anything, and if necessary to die for his sake. Every baptized person, every communicant, in like manner takes the *sacramentum*, the oath of military obedience to Jesus Christ, solemnly declaring that he recognizes the authority of Christ so absolutely, that he is prepared for His sake to do and to dare, and if necessary to die. Let us, in the name of God, live up to our “sacramental” obligation.

But it is necessary to observe that the obedience of Jesus Christ was not limited to the Divine Father. It extended to all authority sanctioned or appointed by the Father. In the first place, He recognized the authority of His mother Mary and of her husband Joseph. We read that even after He became conscious of His divine origin, “He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He was subject unto them.”¹ No feature of modern English society is more alarming than the widespread insubordination of children. This is a reaction from the harshness and unreasonable and arbitrary parental tyranny of the past; but it nevertheless is a terrible evil. The way in which parental authority is ignored or despised especially in the great centres of population, ought to receive much more careful attention both from ministers of religion and from schoolmasters.

¹ Luke ii. 51.

Let it never be forgotten that the last promise and the last warning of the Old Testament had reference to this. Malachi declared that the great work of the forerunner of Christ would be to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."¹ In that way only would it be possible to prevent the earth from being smitten with a curse. Family religion and subjection to parents are the necessary foundations of all religion. Unless the heart of the fathers is turned to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, there can be no revival of religion, and it is impossible to establish the State in righteousness. All children are by the ordinances of God "set under" the authority of their parents. Obedience to parents is placed by the Law of God on a level with obedience to God Himself. The one cannot exist without the other, and every form of undisciplined self-assertion and lawless insubordination begins in the nursery. If parents neglect to exert authority God will hold them responsible for the wickedness and misery which such neglect inevitably entails upon their hapless offspring.

Secondly, Jesus Christ recognized the authority of the Church, even when there was so much in the existing condition of the Church that He strongly and unsparingly condemned. In order that He might be able to bear His share of the burdens of the sanctuary, and contribute to the maintenance of the Temple He wrought a miracle, and found a piece of money in the mouth of a fish. On another occasion, in the very midst of fierce denunciations of the hypocrisy and worthlessness and selfishness of the Scribes and Pharisees He nevertheless said, "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat : all things therefore whatsoever

¹ Mal. iv. 6.

they bid you, these do and observe.”¹ He recognized their legitimate authority even when He denounced their sins. He was a constant worshipper in the synagogue. He devoutly attended the great festivals of His Church in Jerusalem, and so even in the midst of the unfaithfulness and worldliness of the Church He fulfilled all righteousness.

Once more, He unhesitatingly submitted to the authority of the State. He even went so far as to say, “Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s.” He was an intensely patriotic Jew, and the presence of a cruel foreign despot must have been more galling and distressing to Him than to any of His contemporaries. But while there was no other authority in the land, He loyally accepted the authority even of the heathen Cæsar.

I am well aware that the truth I have now illustrated at length is liable to abuse. It has been greatly abused in this country. In former ages ministers of religion have taught the odious, detestable, and anti-scriptural doctrine of “passive obedience” to immoral and unworthy princes. But the claims of Authority which I have now asserted are strictly limited on every side by the equally sacred claims of Freedom. What I have asserted to-day is only half the truth, but it is the half which you and I are in most danger of overlooking and neglecting. On the threshold of the twentieth century we are not in much danger of an extravagant and superstitious submission to authority. But as the sinful human heart is naturally servile, it is necessary to utter a plain warning against a perversion of the wholesome truth we have pondered to-day.

Again and again in the history of States and Churches, there comes a moment when men must say as S. Peter and

¹ Matt. xxviii. 3.

the apostles said, when they were full of the Holy Ghost, immediately after the Day of Pentecost, "We must obey God rather than men."¹ The authority of the Parent, the authority of the Church, and the authority of the State are always subject to the supreme authority of the Christ. Only as His subordinates have they any authority at all, and when either parents, or ecclesiastics, or statesmen do anything inconsistent with the plain and unmistakable teaching of Jesus Christ, as they have so often done—then, like the apostles, even at the risk of our lives, we must withstand them to the face, defy them to the uttermost, and die rather than be disloyal to the Son of God.

He who loves his parents, or his Church, or his country more than he loves Christ, is unworthy of Christ and cannot be a disciple of Christ. In Christ we have a perpetual safeguard against the abuse of authority, but, as I have already said more than once, our special danger is not in that direction. We rather need the warning of Carlyle. Well did he declare that "obedience, little as we may consider that side of the matter, is the primary duty of man. No man but is bound indefeasibly, with all force of obligation, to obey." Carlyle, however, leaned far too much towards authority. One extreme drove him at last to the other. Nevertheless, he was quite right in declaring a thousand times that we need the discipline of obedience. Even Christ "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Perhaps there are certain forms of obedience which can be learned in no other way. One of the most blessed results of suffering is the check which it gives to self-assertion and self-will. If Christ was "set under authority," surely we need not hesitate to place our necks

¹ Acts v. 29.

under the same noble yoke. It was no humiliation to Him. It was the glory of His perfect manhood. And we too, as even impetuous and self-assertive S. Peter learned at last, are “elect unto obedience.”¹

¹ 1 Pet. i. 2.

THE CHRISTIAN ARISTOCRACY.

“A day is ever struggling forward, a day will arrive in some approximate degree, when he who has no work to do, by whatever name he may be named, will not find it good to show himself in our quarter of the Solar System.”—CARLYLE.

THE CHRISTIAN ARISTOCRACY.

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."—MATT. xx. 28.

THE incident which terminates with this great saying is one of the most important although one of the least noticed in the public life of our Lord. He was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. Salome, the mother of S. James and S. John, expected that He was about to establish an earthly kingdom, similar to that established by David and Solomon. Moved by the natural impulse of a proud and affectionate mother, she came to Him "with her sons, worshipping Him, and asking a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wouldest thou? She saith unto Him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left, in Thy kingdom." She assumed that He was about to establish this "kingdom" by expelling the Romans. But He answered, "Ye know not what ye ask." You will observe that He speaks in the plural—"what ye ask." James and John, by their presence, shared in the request of their mother.

They and their mother had failed altogether to understand the tragical news which He had just given them. A few minutes before He had announced that He was "going

up to Jerusalem to be condemned to death, to be delivered unto the Gentiles to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified." But so preoccupied were they with their own prejudices and selfish ambitions that even these plain words did not disillusionize them. "Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" He exclaims, "or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" This second question is added by S. Mark in his account of the incident. "Are ye able to drink the cup of sorrow for sin that is about to be pressed to My lips?" "Are ye able to share My baptism of persecution from men and devils?" They say unto Him, "We are able."

It was a bold answer. It was an ignorant answer. They did not understand Him, and therefore they did not know what they were saying. Nevertheless the answer was true. For Christ at once rejoined, "My cup indeed ye shall drink." Although at that moment they had no conception of His meaning, the time would come when they would understand it full well, and when by the power of the Holy Spirit they would in some degree share His experience. He fully admitted that. He put the best possible construction upon their answer. He took the most indulgent view of their request and of their attitude. And yet their petition could not be granted; for, as He added, "to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give, but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared of My Father."¹ Places of honour in His kingdom are not given by royal caprice or personal favouritism, but are in every instance the rewards of meritorious service. An autocrat, a despotic unconstitutional sovereign like the Czar of Russia or the Sultan of Turkey, exalts and

¹ Matt. xx. 23.

degrades men as He will. Posts of prominence and honour are distributed without reference to personal merit. But it is not so in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In that hierarchy of honour every man occupies the position to which he is morally entitled. When the ten remaining disciples heard this conversation, "they were moved with indignation;" and their indignation proved that they were quite as bad as the two sons of Zebedee, that they had the same low thoughts, the same earthly ambitions, and the same utter misconception of the grounds upon which places of honour would be distributed in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. It was necessary, therefore, that Christ should teach them, the ten as well as the two, the principles which determine preferment in His empire, the conditions of promotion there, the constitution of His aristocracy—in one word, the secret of true kingliness.

The very summit of human ambition is to be a king. Even in this democratic age, or rather I ought to say now more than ever, the kings of men are the observed of all observers. Never did a great poet make a greater mistake than when Tennyson asserted that

"The individual withers, and the world is more and more."

Never was the capable individual more conspicuous or more influential than he is to-day. Never were the kings of men more loyally recognized in all the walks of life. In politics, in art, in science, in literature, in philanthropy, in the Churches, in society the "kings" hold their heads erect. Some men are "born to rule," are the natural leaders of their fellow-men. And the progress of the ages, instead of repressing them, tends only to remove the artificial barriers and the conventional distinctions which

in former times hindered their rise and limited their authority.

Indeed, there is in every human heart a kingly instinct and a kingly ambition. Cæsar's famous sentence is echoed everywhere. All can understand why he would prefer to be "first in that village rather than second in Rome." In a word, every man desires to be a "king" in his own sphere. That kingly ambition is the divine heritage of our race. We are the Royal Family of Creation. Nature everywhere, animate and inanimate, acknowledges our kingly birthright. "Thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet."¹ This is true in some degree of every man. How shall we satisfy this kingly instinct? How shall we walk worthy of our royal birthright?

First of all, Jesus Christ points out with startling plainness the way of the world, the usual method of those who are called "kings." The withering scorn with which He describes the manner of life of most "kings" has been strangely overlooked. But what could be more emphatic or suggestive than these sharp words: "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you!"² The striking peculiarity of so-called "kings," says Christ, is "to lord it" over their subjects—striking expression!—and "to exercise authority over them." In other words, he declares that the kings of this world are as a rule dominated by the lust of Pride and the lust of Power. To be a king is generally, He declares—and the history of

¹ Ps. viii. 5, 6.

² Matt. xx. 25, 26.

all nations endorses His declaration—to be supremely selfish, to turn great privileges into opportunities of self-aggrandizement and self-indulgence. “Not so shall it be among you.” In that short, sharp, decisive sentence Christ condemns and dismisses nearly every ruler since the world began. O! how different is He from the so-called “historians” of the human race! They have devoted countless thousands of pages to flatter and to praise “kings” who have “lorded it” over their fellow-men and “exercised authority” over them. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dismisses that numberless procession of self-assertive, self-indulgent men with one sentence. They have built countless palaces and pyramids to their inglorious memory, and over all those monuments of human pride and human folly Jesus Christ writes the startling words, “*Not so shall it be among you.*”

Then He proceeds to give us an absolutely unprecedented and revolutionary conception of “kingship.” “But whosoever would become *great* among you shall be your servant; and whosoever would be *first* among you shall be your slave.”¹ “Shall be,” as S. Mark yet more exactly reports the Great Teacher, “the slave of all.”² Here is an extraordinary definition of “greatness”! Here is an amazing method of qualifying to be “first,” or, as we should say, “Premier,” or “Prime Minister”! True “greatness” in His vocabulary and in His kingdom is determined not by the number of those who serve you, but by the number whom you serve; and the highest place of all is given to the man who serves the largest number of his fellow-creatures, and serves them most completely. This idea is so novel, so utterly opposed to current sentiments,

¹ Matt. xx. 26, 27.

² Mark x. 44.

that it has not been realized yet. There is no passage in the New Testament which has been so constantly overlooked by commentators and expositors and preachers as that which I am now minutely analyzing.

Have you often or ever before heard a sermon on this sentence? Have you ever pondered and really understood the words of Jesus Christ now solemnly commended to your profoundest attention? How true it is, as Isaiah discovered long ago, that the "thoughts of God" are not our thoughts, neither His ways our ways! For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.¹ Nowhere is that ancient saying more fully exemplified than in the passage before us. It is only by a violent wrench that we can so much as bring our minds to understand what Christ is saying. This doctrine of true greatness is so entirely opposed to almost everything we ever see, or hear, or read, that at first it completely takes our breath away. It seems as though our politicians, and our philosophers, and our artists, and even our teachers of religion had engaged in a vast conspiracy to give us a false conception of greatness, and of the condition of high preferment in the kingdom of God. To say that the majority of Christians do not believe Christ's doctrine on this subject is to say very little. The majority of Christians have never so much as intelligently heard of it. It has not entered their thoughts. Nothing so revolutionary has ever been uttered by any teacher, ancient or modern. Generations and centuries may yet elapse before it is endorsed by public opinion and embodied in the legislation of states.

And yet the Great Master proceeds to state, in the text,

¹ Isa. iv. 8, 9.

that He Himself attained His throne by the very same means that He commended to His disciples. The passage before us is a revelation, not, as is commonly supposed, of His humility, but of His kingly ambition. He became the "servant of servants" not because He desired an obscure position, nor because He despised influence, nor because He wished to be "little and unknown." No real man ever wishes to be "little and unknown." He led His life of lowliest service because He wished to be the "greatest" of all. But He knew that even He could become "great" only by service; and that He could become "greatest of all" only by doing the utmost which even a slave could do—by giving up His life. He "endured the cross," He "despised the shame," "for the joy that was set before Him,"¹—the joy of having all authority in heaven and on earth, and of using that authority to promote the perfect happiness both of heaven and of earth.

It was because His death had in it elements of self-sacrifice and far-reaching service immeasurably greater than any of which patriots or martyrs are capable, that God has "highly exalted Him," and given Him "the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow."² Jesus, once the Carpenter of Nazareth, is King of kings and Lord of lords to-day because His services and His sacrifices are the greatest, that is the kingliest, of all. Even His own position at the summit of the great social hierarchy of His kingdom is not determined by caprice or by favouritism. It is His by merit. It is His because He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (ver. 28). It is His because He led the kind of life

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

² Phil. ii. 9, 10.

which He urged His disciples to lead. And because He led it more completely, more successfully than they ever could, He sits upon the throne of the universe to-day.

What is the great conclusion we have now reached? It is this. The two alternatives presented to every man are—to be a slave, or to be a king. Every one who accepts the ordinary conception of kingship is really a degraded slave. Everybody, on the other hand, who becomes as Christ became the slave of humanity—willing even to wash the feet of the disciples—is a true king, and God will highly exalt him. Every one who habitually yields to the temptation which assailed the twelve apostles on the occasion before us, is a slave—a slave of selfishness; and he walks on the high-road to hell. Every one, on the other hand, who imitates Christ, and lives “not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” is a king; and a throne awaits him in heaven. You may be, in the opinion of this world, a “prince,” a “king,” an “emperor.” But if you “lord it” over your subjects, if you “exercise authority” over them, if you think that privileges are yours for your own self-assertion, self-aggrandizement, and self-indulgence, you are in the judgment of Heaven a “slave,” and the position of a slave awaits you in the world to come.

On the other hand, you may be, in the opinion of this world, a crossing-sweeper or the poverty-stricken owner of a coffee-stall at the windy corner of the street. But if you have “the mind of Christ,” if in that position, however apparently obscure, you are unselfish and brotherly, and if you use your scanty opportunities in order to promote the well-being of others, you are a “king.” You may receive no homage on earth, but when you die angels will

salute you as one of a royal race, and you will wear a crown in heaven.

Dives was clothed in purple and fine linen. He enjoyed himself hugely, and his obsequious fellow-citizens bowed to the earth before him. But he was a selfish, self-centred slave ; and when he died no place could be found for so abject a slave in the Paradise of God. But Lazarus, even in his rags and misery, was a "king." When he died a royal escort led him to the palace of God. Every man, however poor, however unprivileged, may be a "king" in the true sense of that much-abused word. Every man is capable of a kingly, that is a Christ-like, life. "Ye were redeemed," exclaimed S. Peter, "not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers ; but with precious blood, even the blood of Christ."¹

Is that redemption accomplished in your case ? Are you emancipated from the "vain manner of life," admired by wicked men ? Is your mind cleansed from the mischievous nonsense with which the children of this world hide from themselves the conditions of true greatness ? I have said that the great doctrine of this passage is not yet understood. But a glimmering of its meaning has begun to dawn upon the Christian conscience. Slowly, intermittently, here and there, men are beginning to realize that all the great privileges of birth, and rank, and wealth, and culture are given to men, not for their selfish personal gain, nor for the aggrandizement of their families but as the trustees of the bounty of Heaven, in order that they may joyously and effectually serve the unprivileged and the outcast. The great Son of God Himself came into this world without

¹ 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

any of the ordinary trappings of royalty. He never wore the purple, in order that we might never confuse the accident with the essence, the symbol with the reality, the outward sign with the inward fact. But by many words, and especially in this passage, and by many deeds, and especially on the cross, He taught us the conception of kingliness which prevails in heaven, and which, by His grace, is destined some day to prevail on earth. Then there will be no more war, no more civic strife, no more class hatreds, no more sectarian controversy. But all men will dwell together in peace and in brotherly love ; and the days of human misery will be ended.

THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY.

"Why should we thus hate one another? What benefit have we derived from this mutual hatred? Have we not sprung from a common root? Are not our wants and faculties the same? Is not the sign of brotherhood stamped upon the brow of each? Has not nature inspired us all with the same yearning towards higher things? Let us love one another! Human creatures are born to love. Let us unite: united, we shall be stronger."—MAZZINI.



THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY.

"The common people heard Him gladly."—MARK xii. 37.

WE read of Him in ancient prophecy that He was "despised and rejected of men." But it is evident, in the light of this text, that the well-known prophecy must be understood with large limitations—must be understood of the leaders and representatives of men rather than of the rank and file of the human race. In every age "the kings of the earth have set themselves, and the rulers have taken counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."¹ But it is a notable and striking fact that the masses have never rejected Christ. They may have rejected some of the ministers of Christ, and of the organizations which profess to represent Christ; but Christ Himself they have never rejected. The "uncommon people" have too often despised and rejected Him, but the "common people" have always "heard Him gladly" when a real opportunity of hearing Him has been given to them.

It was not the common people who cried, "Crucify Him!" "Crucify Him!" That mob consisted of the servants and hirelings and hangers-on of the wealthy

¹ Ps. ii. 2, 3.

and titled. It is a gross injustice to suppose that the common people, who had received Him with loud hosannas of welcome, were His murderers. I repeat that, as a matter of historic fact, the common people have never rejected Christ. How could they? He was essentially the champion of the common people. He lived the life of the common people. He made His home among the common people. He formed His friendships among the common people. His own life was essentially the life of the common people. He was the Son of a poor village girl. He was born in a stable, and cradled in a manger. For twenty years He lived the uneventful and obscure life of a village carpenter or wheelwright, spending His time in mending ploughs and harrows, and making yokes for oxen. To the end of His days He was very poor. He wore the cheapest and roughest clothes. He fed upon the cheapest and coarsest food. His very appearance was so homely, that when He began to assert His divine prerogatives, those who knew Him best cried out with honest indignation—Is not this man the village carpenter? And are we not on the most familiar terms with His mother and His brothers and His sisters? How dare He assume these airs?¹

Indeed, there are very few of us whose lives have been so entirely commonplace as His. He was very homely and very friendly with everybody. His chief acquaintances were humble fishermen and poor village women and little children. Oh, what a contrast between this Teacher and the great teachers of Greece! One of them naturally, and without exciting the least public surprise, indeed with entire public admiration and approval, inscribed over the portals of His residence these words: “Let no one who

¹ Mark vi. 3.

is ignorant of mathematics enter here." But Jesus Christ said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not." Such was the difference between the friend of the common people and the aristocratic philosopher. Jesus Christ was the first and only great Leader of men who made Himself the patron and champion of the common people. He discovered that—

"Mankind i' the main have little wants, not large."

He discovered that the real and the great "benefactor"¹ is not the man who feeds the pride, the lust, or the ambition of the Few, but the man who satisfies the humble needs of the Many. Until Christ came the Many had always and everywhere been sacrificed to the Few. If that is no longer the case, the revolutionary social change is due entirely to the teaching, example, and influence of Jesus Christ.

It is astonishing how men succeed in deceiving themselves by means of words. Some of those, for example, who in these days reject Christ, or rather imagine they reject Christ, talk eulogistically and enthusiastically about the "republics" of classic antiquity. "Republics" indeed! Let us take the greatest and best and most glorious of them—the republic of Athens. Why, nineteen-twentieths of the citizens of Athens were slaves, the absolute property of their masters; and the greatest philosophers of Greece argued that this hideous social arrangement was necessary, in order that the small minority of citizens who had the impudence to call themselves republicans might have leisure to compose speeches and poems in praise of Freedom! The truth is that those proud despots had no

¹ Luke xxii. 25 (R.V.).

conception of Freedom as we understand that glorious word. And the democratic ideas which are now everywhere in the ascendant are entirely due to the teaching and work of Jesus Christ. He was the first who ever lived to love and comfort the common people. He came to save the dim, incoherent, helpless multitude. It is a remarkable fact that on almost every occasion on which the evangelist states that Jesus Christ saw a "multitude," he adds that Jesus Christ "had compassion" on them. All modern history is a record of the slow revolution by which Jesus Christ is giving the common people their due. The very extension of the franchise which has taken place in our own time, is a direct result of the doctrine of Jesus Christ that personal rights are more sacred and precious than property rights, and that man as man is immeasurably greater than rank or wealth can ever make him.

We do not really and fully believe that doctrine yet. In the month of August, when friends meet at the corner of Piccadilly, they will say to one another, "How empty London is! Everybody is out of town." Mark the familiar phrase! The profoundest revelations of what we really believe are slipped out thoughtlessly in proverbial expressions which pass from mouth to mouth. Men are off their guard when they speak thus. They utter their true self. What a saying the one I have quoted is! London "empty" when there are still five millions of human beings in it! "Everybody" out of town when the streets are still crowded with such dim multitudes of men as the world has never seen before! What does it mean? It means that "everybody" who is supposed to be "somebody" is out of town—say two hundred thousand privileged persons at the outside estimate. So few, indeed, that if they did not

return again no one who did not know them would ever miss them. It would not appear to the eye of a visitor that any one was absent. But in the common speech of West London the two hundred thousand count for more than the five millions who never go away to the seaside or the moors.

Now, if Jesus Christ had lived in West London, and had spoken to a friend in August, it would have been morally impossible for Him to say that London was then "empty," and that "everybody" was out of town. For Jesus loved the common people. They were as dear to Him and as constantly in His thought as the uncommon people. But such expressions as that which I have just quoted are still freely used, because we have not yet fully received the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Take one other too familiar phrase which my colleague, Mr. Mark Guy Pearse, sometimes brings under our notice. Have you not often read in Christian biography that such a one was born of "poor but pious parents"? What a significant word that "but" is! I have never read that a man was born of "rich but pious parents," though that would be a legitimate expression, for Christ Himself has warned us that the rich are exposed to such perils that "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."¹ It would therefore be quite legitimate, by the use of the word "but," to intimate our delight that rich parents were pious. But why should any one think it in the least surprising or strange that poor parents should be pious? Ninety-nine out of every hundred—we might, I think, safely say, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand—Christians

¹ Matt. xix. 24.

are poor. In all ages the gospel has been "preached to the poor," and loved by the poor and accepted by the poor. Why, then, should any man talk about poor "but" pious parents? The real reason is the one I have given. We have never yet entered into "the mind of Christ," never yet grasped His intense and peculiar sympathy with common people.

Let me give only one other illustration from the words we use. If I met you suddenly at the corner of the street and asked you how much So-and-so was "worth," you would immediately think of his account at the banker's. It would never occur to you that the number of money-bags at a man's disposal is no indication of his true "worth," has nothing to do with it. Real worth is determined by moral and mental gifts, by character and intellectual ability. But who of all your acquaintances would ever imagine that you were referring to a man's character when you asked what he was "worth"? The more you ponder this familiar expression, the more you will realize how deep and wide a gulf yet separates us from Jesus Christ.

A recently started and widely circulated London newspaper had the courage in its first issue, when announcing its programme, to say, "Our politics will be the politics of the washerwoman." It meant that it would contemplate legislative proposals from the point of view of the washerwoman, and of the effect projected legislation would have upon her hard industrious life. That was a profoundly Christian sentiment. If all our politicians could be induced to contemplate legislative and administrative proposals from the point of view of the hard-working wives and daughters of the poor, that would be more likely than in almost any

other way to bring their conduct into harmony with the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Of one thing I am certain. If Jesus Christ were to visit London this very night and then to return to Paradise, He would not report and describe there the resorts of pleasure or of business which most London visitors frequent, and by which they are impressed, but He would utter to distressed angels words like these—

“ Such eyes I saw that craved the light alone,
Such mouths that wanted bread and nothing else,
Such hands that supplicated handiwork—
Men with the wives, and women with the babes ;
Yet all these pleading just to live, not die ! ”

The disadvantages, the temptations, the privations, the miseries, of the common people would preoccupy Him. Ah ! the day is coming when statesmen will love the common people as Christ loved them. Then we shall see some strange and wonderful sights. There are some things, indeed, which we shall no longer see. We shall not see the liquor-shop at the corner of every street. We shall not see immoral men welcomed in drawing-rooms. We shall not see the memorials of sanguinary wars on every side. Neither shall we see vice and misery in every street. But we shall live in the midst of a healthy, contented, and happy people.

It is interesting to notice, before we close, the quality which specially endeared Jesus Christ to the common people. It was not what superficial persons would imagine. It was not some peculiar gentleness. On the contrary, it was fearless moral courage. In the passage immediately following our text He denounces, in startling, flaming, terrible terms, the selfishness, the greed, and the hypocrisy of un-

worthy ministers of religion. There is nothing that the masses of people value so much as plain bold speech with respect to all evil. They are quite willing to be told their own faults and their own sins by any true prophet of God who is equally ready to denounce the follies and crimes of the great and privileged. There was nothing that so impressed our Lord's contemporaries as His moral courage. You may remember the remarkable passage in the Acts, where the magistrates "took knowledge" of Peter and John "that they had been with Jesus."¹ They had caught something of the spirit and tone of their Master. They reminded the magistrates of Him. What was it that was so Christ-like in their demeanour? Not their gentleness, but, as S. Luke declares, "their boldness," their unhesitating and unfaltering moral courage. Nothing is so rare, nothing so valuable, as moral courage. No man must ever expect to influence the masses of people if he lacks that. The two qualities which are essential to leadership in this democratic age are, first, disinterestedness, and secondly, moral courage.

But now, before I close, let me ask you, Are you an "uncommon person"? Do you think, therefore, that I have been bearing rather hardly upon you and upon your small, privileged, and select class? If you do you have entirely mistaken me. At any rate, clearly understand that Jesus Christ never rejected any uncommon person who wished to come to Him, and you are heartily welcome.

But in what respect are you an uncommon person? Do you possess personal beauty? No one but a fool would despise or disparage that. Personal beauty in all ages and in all ranks of life has been one of the most potent of forces. It is so potent that in many respects it is an awful and a fearful

¹ Acts iv. 13.

gift. But you may thank God for it, and use it for the highest ends.

Or are you uncommon in the possession of genius? Have you some great gift of music, of poetry, of eloquence, of thought? This is even more precious. Bring your genius to Christ.

Above all, are you endowed with moral gifts? These may be most blessedly employed in the service of God and man. Whatever you do, never forget that Jesus Christ, although He loved the common people, was Himself a most uncommon person. He belonged essentially to the Classes, although on the highest and most divine ground He made Himself one of the Masses. He used His great gifts in order to serve the ungifted. Uncommon qualities are no barrier to the highest service. Indeed, all the greatest benefactors of common people have themselves been singularly uncommon. There is nothing more unanimously taught by history than the fact that special gifts, both of body and mind, instead of disqualifying, are essential qualifications for the highest public service. We should, therefore, regard all these gifts, not as occasions for pride or domineering, but as opportunities for wider and greater service to others less gifted than ourselves.

But perhaps you are a common person? There is nothing particular about you; nobody knows you, and you therefore assume that nobody cares for you. You are deeply mistaken. Jesus Christ is intensely interested in you, as intensely as if you were the Prime Minister of England, or the Queen herself. And why is He so interested in you? Because He can discern the latent qualities of your soul. There is something in common people which, by the grace of God, may make them very uncommon. The authors of

these Gospels—S. Matthew, S. Mark, S. Luke, S. John—at first to all outward seeming were very common persons indeed, unlettered, obscure, poor, and yet they have become some of the most uncommon benefactors of the human race. Why? Because they yielded themselves to the magic influence of Jesus Christ. The sculptor sees hidden in depths of rough and shapeless marble, soft forms of immortal beauty, which in due time, with much hammering and smoothing, he will exhibit to an admiring world. In like manner you may seem to yourself, or to us who have only a superficial knowledge of you, a very commonplace, unattractive, incapable, and useless person. But Christ looks into the depths of your soul, and knows that, if you are willing, He can manufacture you into a God-like saint. And when that splendid work is done, this shall be your highest, your most divine service—like your Great Master you shall love and save “the common people.”

THE CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

“For all right judgment on any man or thing, it is useful, nay essential, to see his good qualities before pronouncing on his bad.”—
GOETHE.

THE CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

"To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."—LUKE xix. 9.

You have often heard a sermon on the conversion of Zacchæus. I have frequently preached about it myself. But there is one aspect of this beautiful episode to which I have never referred, and to which I invite your special attention now. I want you to ponder the way in which salvation came to Zacchæus. It came by appealing to all that was best in him.

There is no doubt that Zacchæus had been a very wicked man. The publican of our Lord's time, as is well known, was a tax-gatherer. The Roman government then practised the same rotten system of collecting the taxes that is practised in Turkey to-day. The taxes were farmed out to the highest bidders, who took good care not only to collect all that the government required, but a good deal more, which they retained for themselves. Every kind of extortion was practised. In addition to the disreputableness of the occupation as it then existed, a Jew, by entering it, was a traitor to his fatherland, and utterly degraded himself by making money out of the oppression and the humiliation of his fellow-countrymen. It is not surprising that the publicans as a class were despised and hated. But I

think there are many evidences that like the modern publicans, the liquor-sellers of our own time, they had one excellent virtue—they were very hospitable. I notice, for example, that when Matthew the publican was converted he made a great feast. He went and gathered all his friends together in order that they might hear from the lips of Christ the great message which had redeemed his own life.

Now, when Christ met Zacchæus He laid hold of Zacchæus's one good quality. He made that the fulcrum of His lever. I am afraid there was not much else to which He could appeal. When Zacchæus said, "I give to the poor," he did not mean, as some benevolent expositors have tried to explain, that it was his regular practice to give to the poor. The context clearly indicates that what he meant was, "I will give; I will now give—now as the result of my conversion, and as a practical proof of the genuineness of my conversion." But if there was no other good quality in this man, there was at least a generous, hospitable disposition, and Jesus Christ appealed to that. He most delicately and graciously asked a favour at the hands of this wealthy outcast. He trusted this despised renegade.

The more I think of that the more it impresses me. Christ did not preach at him, or upbraid him. Suppose Christ had said, "Zacchæus, you are a desperate sinner, a liar, a cheat, an extortioner; you deserve the general hatred which dogs your steps, and unless you repent you will go to hell." Ah! if Christ had addressed him thus, how hard his face would have become; how he would have clenched his teeth, and yielded himself finally to misery and despair! But what did Christ say? He said in a voice gentle, courteous, beseeching, "Zacchæus, make haste, and come

down ; for to-day I must abide at thy house." And Zacchæus did make haste. That electric appeal to his better self transformed him. Christ trusted him ! That saved him suddenly, completely, for ever.

We often speak of trusting Christ. Here is the obverse side of the great fact. Let us for once try to realize how Christ trusts us. Such trust even from man to man has often produced the most stupendous results. Who can ever forget the overwhelming influence of Nelson's signal to the British fleet?—"England expects every man to do his duty." That thrilling sentence inspired every seaman with an intense desire to prove worthy of the confidence which his country reposed in him. We have all also heard the famous saying of the Rugby boys, in the days of their great head-master : "We must not tell Arnold a lie. He would believe us."

I had under my notice quite recently a beautiful illustration of the way in which confidence begets a noble resolve, a new ideal, and the triumph of a man's better self. A friend of mine had occasion to buy a horse. He went to a horse-dealer and described the kind of animal he wanted. The horse-dealer said, "I can get you exactly the kind of horse you want. It will cost thirty pounds." "Very well," said my friend, bringing out his cheque-book, and proceeding to write the cheque for thirty pounds. "Here is the money ; send me the horse as soon as you can." The dealer positively gasped for breath ! He was bewildered for a moment. He began to perspire. At last he gasped out, "But—but—but you have never seen the horse." "O !" said my friend, "what of that ? I know nothing about horses. You know everything. I trust you. You will do the best you can for me." The man burst into tears.

It was the first time in his life he had been trusted in that way. The appeal to his better self was irresistible. He grasped my friend's hand and said, "Sir, I will take good care that you have not trusted me in vain;" and he sent an admirable horse, which more than satisfied the description he had given and the expectation of my friend. Now, the horse-dealer, like many of his class, had not been an over-scrupulous man in business transactions. He had constantly been guilty of sharp practices, and if my friend had displayed the usual suspicion of his honesty, the horse-dealer would have tried to overreach him. But when that gentleman trusted him, and placed himself unreservedly at his mercy, the better nature of the man asserted itself, and he instantly resolved to be worthy of the confidence reposed in him.

Your smart, suspicious man of business is really a great fool, and constantly outwits himself. How often have I heard him say, and pride himself for saying, "I treat every man as a scoundrel until he proves himself honest"! What is the result? That every one who has dealings with him suspects him also, does his best to outreach him, and as a rule justifies his suspicion. But if, like my friend, he adopted a totally different policy, he would find that men would respond to his appeal as Zacchæus responded in Palestine, and as the horse-dealer responded in England.

Unfortunately, "preternatural suspicion," as Carlyle called it, pervades our whole life. The organization of society is largely founded upon fear and distrust, and so far the organization of society is utterly rotten. The wise among us are beginning to discover the dead failure of a mere police regime and of our prison system.

The Rev. Egerton Young, the well-known missionary to

the Red Indians in the far west of Canada, once made an extraordinary and memorable statement in a public meeting at which I was present. He said that when he went among the Red Indians he found they had no locks and no keys in their houses. He necessarily followed their custom. The doors, windows, drawers, and boxes of his house were always open. The Red Indians, further, have a way of walking in and out of a friend's house without notice or ceremony, without knocking or ringing, just when the fit takes them by day or by night. Moreover, in their moccasins they came and went as noiselessly as cats. Notwithstanding all these circumstances so peculiarly favourable to thieving, during the whole of the time he lived among them he did not lose one single article. But the very day he returned to what is grimly regarded as the region of "civilization," the very day the policeman appeared, the very day he once more found himself in a society that used locks and keys, some valuable trinkets belonging to his wife were stolen!

Where suspicion and distrust abound, men sink to the level that is expected of them; whereas among the Red Indians mutual confidence is the common policy, and men prove themselves worthy of it. After all, there is a profound truth underlying the one-sidedness of Count Tolstoi's paradoxical exposition of our Lord's great doctrine, "Resist not evil." John Bright was right: "Force is no remedy." The security of life really depends neither upon soldiers nor upon policemen. And when the rulers of men succeed in emancipating themselves from the delusions and superstitions of the past, and make their appeal to the better selves of their subjects, it may be hoped that white men will attain to the moral level of red men.

Another illustration of the great Christian policy of overcoming evil by good and trusting men rather than suspecting them, is found in the well-known early history of the great state of Pennsylvania. For sixty years after the establishment of that Quaker colony the colonists went about unarmed. What was the result? Not a single drop of human blood was shed during that period, although the Red Indians were incessantly at war with every other colony and with one another. Unfortunately, after sixty years of Quaker legislation, the Pennsylvanian colonists began to imitate the emigrants in other colonies and went about armed. From that moment disputes sprang up and war broke out.

The fact is that our prison system and our military system are both utterly rotten. The day is assuredly coming when man will trust his fellow-man. Then all will be well, and the hideous criminal and military systems of the past will be regarded by our wiser children as incomprehensible delusions of a night of misery which has passed away for ever.

With respect to the more directly religious aspects of this principle of Divine Charity, you will observe that the religious classes were very much shocked and horrified at the way in which Christ trusted and honoured Zacchæus. I am sorry to say that the religious classes generally are shocked and horrified by this principle. They have been, I blush to admit, among the most vehement advocates of force and suspicion and penal enactments. Too many of them have believed, like the detestable Duke of Alva, that men are ruled by fear—a doctrine as false as it is repulsive.

Probably our most easily besetting temptation is to have too low an opinion of outsiders, of the unconverted, of those

who have not yet made a religious profession. This dangerous tendency of good men was painfully illustrated by Abraham thousands of years ago. You remember that when he went into Egypt with his wife, he assumed that Pharaoh would be influenced by evil motives, and would not hesitate to do wrong. Abraham therefore persuaded his wife, Sarah, to join with him in acting a disgraceful lie. What was the result? Pharaoh turned out to be a better man, a far more honourable and devout man, than Abraham supposed. And so the great patriarch brought upon himself the painful humiliation of receiving a well-merited public rebuke from one whom he had so mistakenly regarded as a religious inferior, incapable of lofty morality.

From the days of Abraham until now, orthodox and religious men have been constantly exposed to the same danger. They have greatly over-estimated the extent to which ordinary men are under the influence of evil, and as greatly under-estimated the extent to which ordinary men are capable of responding to lofty motives. But that divine "love" which is the very essence of true Christianity "thinketh no evil."

Let us henceforth imitate the example of Jesus Christ. Let us in business, in social intercourse, in politics, and in the promotion of Christianity, appeal to the best in men. Have you ever realized the tender charitableness of God, when He put into our mouths such a confession as this, "All we like sheep have gone astray"? Like sheep, not like wolves; not deliberately, as the result of *malice prepense*, but foolishly, thoughtlessly. Those who know most of the poor think least evil of them. What is the testimony borne by the Sisters of this Mission as the result of their daily intercourse with the destitute poor in the slums of Soho? They

tell us that they are more and more impressed by the fact that the sin they encounter is generally the result of thoughtlessness and of physical misery rather than the outcome of a deliberate love of evil. Sister Agnes, for example, one of the most competent and experienced of our district Sisters, says that those whom she visits are generally people who "have not seen the light rather than those who reject it," and that the hapless crowds in the back streets are "more weak than wicked." Her ceaseless, I may add most successful effort is, as she says, "to find the spark of the divine in every soul" she visits, and then to fan that spark into a flame with the breath of Christ-like sympathy and truthfulness. All who adopt that method, the method which Christ practised with Zacchæus, are astonishingly and delightfully successful.

Browning has well said—

"God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides ; one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her."

You must often have been struck, as I have, at the way in which some pure and noble woman has lavished her priceless love upon an apparently worthless wretch. He has seemed to us utterly unworthy of such love, and, indeed, positively repulsive. But she had seen "the soul-side" that no one else—except God—has ever seen. Why should that "soul-side" be shown, as is so often the case, only to one particular woman? Let us also by love and tenderness manage to get a view of it. Let us especially try to show our own better "soul-side" to those whom we wish to serve. That will more than anything else bring their better "soul-side" to light. Jesus Christ sees the better "soul-side" in every one. He sees it in you. He sees that there is some-

thing very lovable in you—will you not trust Him? He has faith in you—will you not have faith in Him? He knows that you are still capable of divine goodness. He delicately and graciously invites Himself to your house. He can make a splendid man of you, my brother. He can make a noble woman of you, my sister. O! welcome Him at once publicly, joyfully, as Zacchæus welcomed Him. Then go forth to proclaim His love to others, especially to those who are sitting in the valley of despair.

THE CHRISTIAN USE OF EVIL.

“Never a sigh of passion or of pity,
Never a wail for weakness or for wrong,
Has not its archive in the angels’ city,
Finds not its echo in the endless song.”

F. W. H. MYERS.

THE CHRISTIAN USE OF EVIL.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you [margin, ‘obtained you by asking’], that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren.”—LUKE xxii. 31, 32.

NOTHING could be more unscientific or unphilosophical than to doubt the existence of Satan, a personal spirit of evil. To talk about a “principle of evil” is to talk meaningless rubbish, and to use sounds absolutely devoid of sense. Principle of evil, indeed! Who ever heard of such a thing? Who can really imagine such a thing? All moral good and all moral evil of which we have any conception is always, and must always be, personal.

The existence of Satan positively relieves the difficulty occasioned by the existence of evil. The evil in this world did not originate here or in our own hearts. How Satan became evil is another matter, and must be left for the present. The external origin of evil lessens the sinfulness and heightens the prospects of the human race.

Again, we see at present only a part of the field in which the destinies of the human race are being worked out. Events on earth are influenced by events elsewhere, and events elsewhere are influenced by those on earth. From this standpoint much that was before inexplicable begins at once to be explained.

Our text, for example, throws quite a flood of light upon the temptations, duties, and privileges of all who profess and call themselves Christians. We should notice carefully the Revised Version, which here, as elsewhere, is so much more exact and intelligible than the Authorized Version. The text is a sudden volcanic outburst. What caused it? Why did Christ burst into such vehement and passionate speech? The context shows that it was because His disciples had just been wrangling with one another "which of them" should be "accounted greatest." They were fiddling while Rome was burning. At the very time that they were indulging in these wretched rivalries they were unconsciously and swiftly approaching the greatest ordeal and the most tragical crisis of their lives. Their faith was about to be tried as it had never been tried before. But instead of preparing and watching for the terrible onset of the foe, they were miserably quarrelling with one another for the pre-eminence.

This strange passage teaches us how Satan renders an undesigned and unwilling service to God and man. He appears in the same character in the great drama of Job. Then he asks, "Doth Job fear God for nought?"¹ The sufferings of Job were permitted to refute the insinuation of Satan, and to prove before all heaven that man is capable of unselfish and disinterested goodness.

We have a similar reference in the Revelation² to the unwilling part which Satan plays in the redemption of the human race. "I heard a great voice in heaven," says S. John, "saying, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which

¹ Job i. 9.

² Rev. xii. 10.

accuseth them before our God day and night." That is the Satanic *rôle*—"the accuser of our brethren." His great object is to create or to perpetuate a breach between God and man. He accuses God to man, as in the ever-lamentable case of our mother Eve, when he would fain persuade her that God did not mean what He said, and was not influenced by a benevolent purpose in relation to man. Again, he accuses man to God. Always, "day and night," as S. John says, he is accusing good men before God, and the accusation which he brings against them is the accusation which he brought against Job. He says that they do not serve God for nought, that they are all selfish, and that they obey God for what they can get.

Now Christ and His disciples were deliberately handed over to Satan, as Job had been of old, in order that he might test the truth of his accusation. God was not afraid to expose His children to the ordeal. No refutation of that subtle and hideous accusation could be so decisive, and so advantageous to men and angels, as that good men should be exposed to all the assaults of cunning selfishness and yet pass triumphantly through the terrible ordeal.

First of all, Christ Himself was tempted, we are told, "in all points like as we are."¹ When the military police broke upon His privacy at midnight in the Garden of Gethsemane He said to them, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness."² And how impressive is His account of the fiercest encounter of all, when Satan made his most desperate attempt to discover in Him, as he had discovered in all others, some root of selfishness! "I will no more speak much with you, for the prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in Me; but that the world may know that

¹ Heb. iv. 15.

² Luke xxii. 53.

I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”¹ How significant is the name which He gives His deadly adversary!—“the prince of the world:” the representative and the ruler of all whose lives are founded upon selfishness, of all who accept self-seeking as the master-motive of their existence. But this “prince of the world” “hath nothing” in Christ. He found in Him no root of selfishness. Christ was absolutely unselfish and disinterested. His life was so wholly “hid in God,” that in His presence every temptation fell powerless to the ground. He and He alone of all the sons of Adam passed absolutely scathless through the Satanic test.

But when “the accuser of our brethren” turned to the disciples he found in them, as in all other men, a fulcrum for his lever, a tendency to selfishness of which he made fearful use. Christ knew their weakness, and He watched the approach of their tempter with deep concern. Again and again and again He tried to rouse them from their infatuated indifference. When He had reached the place of prayer on the Mount of Olives He said, “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.”² Again when He came to them, in the midst of His agony, and found them sleeping, He said with deep distress, “Why sleep ye? rise and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”³ But all His warnings were in vain. All His entreaties were thrown away upon them.

Then came the awful testing-time without that preparation of prayer which He had urged, and which would have made so great a difference. They were sifted “as wheat,” “like as corn is sifted in a sieve,”⁴ so that the worthless chaff might be riddled away and nothing but the solid grain

¹ John xiv. 30, 31. ² Ver. 40. ³ Ver. 46. ⁴ Amos ix. 9.

remain. One of them, the “son of perdition,” failed utterly in that fierce testing, and “went to his own place.” How terrible is the language of S. John! “During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him.”¹ And again, “After the sop, then entered Satan into him,” and he “went out straightway : and it was night.”² Alas, alas ! the double night of nature and of treacherous and deadly selfishness. Judas Iscariot failed utterly under the Satanic test ; and it “would have been a good thing for that man if he had never been born.”

At the first shock all seemed to fail under the test. “They all forsook Him and fled.” But all, except Judas Iscariot, returned and retrieved their character. Why did they return? The answer to this question is found in the astonishing and unparalleled prayer recorded by S. John in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel. Referring to that awful crisis, our Lord, in the course of His prayer, says, “Holy Father . . . while I was with them, I kept them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me: and I guarded them, and not one of them perished, but the son of perdition ; that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”³ Christ “guarded” them, and so, notwithstanding their momentary failure, they were brought back again and triumphed over the tempter. Christ prayed for them all, and He prayed specially, as we read in the text, that S. Peter’s faith might not fail. Observe the exact language: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you”—that word is in the plural ; it means all the disciples—“but I made supplication for thee”—that word is in the singular ; it means S. Peter only—“that thy faith fail not : and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren.”

¹ John xiii. 2.

² Ibid. 27, 30.

³ Ver. 12.

God generally uses a human instrument for the accomplishment of His purposes among men, and on this occasion He chose as His instrument the last person in the world whom we should have imagined under the circumstances He would have chosen—the man who apparently was the most unfaithful of all the eleven. Observe the precise nature of the Lord's petition. It was that the "faith" of Peter might not fail. Much in Peter, Christ knew, would fail, must fail. It was useless to pray that Peter might not yield to temptation. It was inevitable, under the circumstances, that he should fail under the test. And he did fail, although not in the way that is usually assumed. When we read, for example, that he began "to curse and to swear," we must not, as is commonly supposed, imagine that he began to use blasphemous language, and was guilty of profane swearing. Literally, this phrase might be rendered, "He put himself under an anathema, and made a solemn affirmation." He did not "swear" in the popular, but in the judicial, sense. He "took an oath" as do witnesses in courts of justice. It is true that so doing he perjured himself, and that his conduct was shocking and scandalous. He was guilty, however, not of profanity but of perjury.

Now observe that Christ prayed that his "faith" might not fail. That is to say, his faith in the power and willingness of God to save him in spite of his perjury and backsliding. His self-trust, his self-assertion would fail him, must fail him. But Christ prayed that he might not lose his confidence in God, and in the willingness of God to heal all his backslidings.

A very common mistake which we make after our conversion is to expect that we shall be perfect at once. The

change which takes place when first we really trust in Christ as our own personal Saviour is so vast and so glorious, that we are tempted to believe we shall never be seriously harassed by sin again, and certainly shall not yield to it. This delusion is largely shared by others, especially by our unconverted relatives, and by those who are constantly associated with us in business. Indeed, they seem to expect perfection from us even more than we do ourselves. Under these circumstances, when we fall short of our ideal, when the force of old habits begins to make itself felt, when familiar temptations return, when former associates perplex us, when we find ourselves failing and actually fallen, then we are in danger of yielding to the counsels of despair, and abandoning all attempt to reach the high level of goodness at which we aimed in the first glow and gush of a happy Christian experience.

Now, Christ foresaw that this would be Peter's danger in a very aggravated degree. After he had denied his Lord on oath, publicly and under most humiliating and disgraceful circumstances, his distress would be so great that he would be tempted to say, "It is useless for me to try to be a Christian." Therefore Christ prayed that even in the darkest hour of his denial Peter might not yield to that paralyzing thought.

When we come to contemplate Peter's fall dispassionately and carefully, when we submit it to scientific diagnosis, we discover—startling as it may sound—that his perjury really did not make him a worse man than he was before. It only revealed the evil that was within him. The temptation of Satan was a drastic kind of medicine which brought to the surface of his soul the symptoms of an internal disease. It did not create an evil which had no previous existence.

But it brought it out into broad daylight. For what was Peter's easily besetting sin? It was the easily besetting sin of all the natural leaders of men—self-trust. Now, his public and shameful fall did at any rate knock the bottom out of that, did undoubtedly make such ignorant self-trust impossible for the future. That terrible public denial cured him completely of his boastful self-reliance.

You remember how Christ said to him significantly, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?” How that phrase, “more than these,” tortured his soul! Before his fall he was ready to declare that “although all men” forsook Christ he would never do so. He drew the most boastful comparisons between himself and the other disciples. James might forsake Christ, John might forsake Him, Andrew might forsake Him; but he, Peter, would never do so! Now, however, that his self-trust has received so terrible a blow, he passionately deprecates any comparison between himself and others. All that he dares now to assert is that Christ, who knows the human heart, knows that he loves Him. We see in this moral change an astonishing illustration of the way in which God makes the wrath both of man and of Satan to praise Him. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!”¹

Satan is unconsciously and unwittingly a minister of God to us. His temptations reveal our weak points and expose our faults. Of course there is a more excellent way. It would have been immeasurably better if Peter and the other disciples had accepted the instructions and the warnings of Christ. But as they refused to be put upon

¹ Rom. xi. 33.

their guard, and as they neglected to pray, there was nothing for it except to allow Satan to administer a knock-down blow which they could never forget.

We are now in a position to understand how wisely Christ, in His prayer, selected Simon Peter as the fittest man to comfort his brethren. I have already admitted that at first sight Peter seems to be of all men the most unsuitable. But, from the point of view we have now reached, it is evident that no man could reassure their failing hearts so well as he. When Christ's prayer on his behalf was answered, when he had refused to yield to despair, when he had shaken off the deadly temptation that it was useless for him to try to be a Christian, how irresistibly he could appeal to his fellow-disciples, who had not fallen so publicly, so scandalously, and so disgracefully as he ! He might go to each of them, in the darkest hour of their discouragement, and say, "See ! even I who perjured my soul, who denied my Lord with oaths and curses, have been forgiven and restored. You must not doubt. You must not hesitate. If the Great Spirit of God can rehabilitate me, the most impulsive, the most inconstant, the most unfaithful of you all, how much more may every one of you, even though you forsook Him and fled, return to Him in the full assurance of humble faith !" And we know, as a matter of fact, that the prayer of Christ was so fully answered, that from the morning of the Resurrection S. Peter was first and foremost in the apostolic band, boldest in confessing his Lord, and most resolute at every crisis in strengthening their hearts to fear neither men nor devils. Under the influence of his example and teaching the self-trust and self-seeking which the disciples had so disgracefully and so frequently exhibited, utterly disappeared. They no longer contended

with one another which should be the greatest, but they were all “of one heart and soul,” and were filled with such invincible moral courage that they became

“A sect, which hath no dread of death,
But will spend life and breath, and gold and pains,
To succour any wretch ; because they hold
This Christ did die for him.”

Under the impulse of the heroic example set by the apostles and pre-eminently by the “converted” and restored Simon Peter, the primitive Church passed triumphantly through the ten bloody persecutions of the Roman Empire. And the heroism of their faith has survived in many noble forms, in many lands, to this very hour. “Satan asked to have thee, that he might sift thee as wheat.” God granted Satan’s request, for He knew that in the rough and terrible sifting-time the chaff of their selfishness would be swept away for ever, and nothing would remain but the golden grain of Christ-like selflessness. Such is the unwilling service which “the accuser of our brethren” is ever rendering to the children of God.

THE CHRISTIAN ASPECT OF THE CENSUS.

“Our country hath a gospel of her own
To preach and practise before all the world,—
The freedom and divinity of man,
The glorious claims of human brotherhood.”

LOWELL.

THE CHRISTIAN ASPECT OF THE CENSUS.

“ When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel according to those that are numbered of them, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them ; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them.”—
EXOD. xxx. 12.

THIS is the first census of which we have any recorded history. It took place more than three thousand years ago. To-night, as you know, the British census will be taken in this city and in every part of this kingdom. I need scarcely dwell upon the grave importance of making an absolutely truthful and conscientious return in every case. Not merely because the just penalty of any deception, if discovered, will be a fine of £5, but because the whole of the information that must be put to-morrow morning into the census-paper by the responsible head of every household is of the greatest value for social, political, medical, and religious purposes. For social purposes because the distribution and varieties of employment will furnish us with invaluable information in dealing with the great problem of pauperism. For political purposes because in a democratic age like this power must more and more follow the distribution of the population. For medical purposes because the light that will be thrown

upon some of the most distressing physical afflictions of our countrymen will be very great. And also for religious purposes in dealing with the great problem of evangelizing the whole land in the name of Jesus Christ. I am very sorry that we do not, as a nation, realize the immense practical importance of the census. We ought to have a census at least every five years, and the census we take ought to be much more full and complete than that which will be taken to-night. It seems to me that on this census night, which will not recur in the history of many of us—for there are scores, and perhaps hundreds, in St. James's Hall who will be dead and forgotten before another census-paper is distributed in this country—it is specially appropriate to remember the religious aspect of the census; and that we find in the record of the first census described in my text.

It was taken in the wilderness, when the children of Israel were escaping from the house of bondage in Egypt, more than three thousand years ago. The verse which immediately follows the text describes, in a graphic and picturesque way, the precise manner in which that census was taken—very different from that in which we shall take the census to-night. “This they shall give, every one that passeth over unto them that are numbered: half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary; half a shekel for an offering to the Lord.” All the tribes were gathered in groups, and every man of twenty years of age and upwards was called out, and left the crowd of men and women and children in which he had been standing, and “passed over” to the crowd which was being formed on the other side—the group of those who were “numbered.” It is significant that at that time they did not count the women and the children. They were not much considered then, and they go

for little still in every country which is not under the influence of Jesus Christ. We men owe more than language can describe to Christ ; but women and children owe even more than we. In the census-paper to-night you will have to put in the names of the women and children, even of the babe born this day, quite as much as the name of the most venerable patriarch among you. In this respect our census, being a Christian census, is very different from the original census, in which, according to the barbarous ideas of the time, it was not necessary to take account of any except grown-up men. You will observe that when these men had "passed over" to the group of those who were "numbered" and whose number was solemnly recorded, every man who passed over to that group had to pay a half-shekkel, which was used for the purpose of carrying on the work of God in the Tabernacle. It was, like the tithe, devoted to religious purposes. Now the question I wish to ask you to-night is, Why had they to pay the half-shekkel? You will have to pay nothing when your name is entered in the census-paper. But then every one had to pay a small sum of money, about $13\frac{1}{2}d.$, by the express command of God. Why? Because the census was the solemn recognition of the separate individuality, the true personality, and therefore the responsible manhood of every full-grown Israelite. You will observe that for this reason there was no respect of persons in the census. In the fifteenth verse we read "the rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than the half-shekkel." All had to give precisely the same amount on that occasion, which was made small that all might be able to give it. Therefore, the census, from the religious side, was a very solemn national recognition of the Divine Equality of all men. For

the purpose of that census all men were declared equal, and all were equal. That census, in other words, was the official recognition of man as man, apart entirely from all the artificial distinctions which, under other circumstances, divided them. That feature of the ancient census, taken more than three thousand years ago, will be retained in the census taken in London to-night. The Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister, and the Archbishop of Canterbury will each count for no more than the lodging-house tramp or the aged pauper in the Union. Every man will be one man—that and nothing else. The census, when you think of it, is really a very rigid and extreme application of the popular political formula—"one man, one vote." It reduces us all to our primitive and fundamental similarity. It is, to use Carlyle's famous phrase, a removal of all the "clothes" which distinguish us. You may remember that Carlyle, in "*Sartor Resartus*," grimly observed that if you were to lance the veins of a prince and the veins of a peasant you would find similarly constituted blood in each of them. And the census which absolutely ignores for purposes of numeration all class distinction, is a national declaration of our common humanity, and therefore of the solidarity of our interests.

Why, under these circumstances, the ransom of half a skekel? Everybody when he went over to the official group was called specifically as a man of twenty years of age and upward. Well, what of that? Let us see. Strip away wealth. Strip away learning. Strip away rank. Strip away fame. Reduce us to our natural nakedness. What is left? Nothing but a sinful man; nothing but a sinful man. There are four moments in our ecclesiastical life when we are all reduced to this naked simplicity, to this fundamental similarity. At the moment of our Baptism, the minister

receives into his arms—literally following the example of our Lord—“this child,” not this prince or this peasant. Again, at the moment of our Marriage. I remember that many years ago, when the Prince of Wales was married and I was a mere boy, I was struck by the fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury turned to the Prince of Wales and said, “Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?” not “this Princess of Denmark.” And then to the woman he said in effect—we know nothing of the heir to the British throne in the House of God, wilt thou have “this man” to be thy wedded husband? I was much impressed even then at the way in which the most exalted were reduced to their simple humanity. Again, at the Holy Communion, such as was celebrated in this Hall this morning, all men are absolutely equal. There is in the House of God only one Table for rich and poor. I remember a beautiful incident in the life of the Duke of Wellington when he was Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, a position occupied by the late Earl Granville, whose death we all so much lament. The Iron Duke was in church and about to receive the Lord’s Supper, when a peasant, who had not noticed the Duke, kneeled down at his side. Discovering who he was, and being much terrified, the peasant was getting up, when the Duke put his hand on his shoulder, and said, “Don’t move; we are all equal here.” Wisely said, profoundly true. There is one other moment when we are all equal—the moment of Death. If any mighty monarch is fortunate enough to be a Christian, the utmost the Christian minister will say at his burial is this, “We commit the body of our dear brother to the dust.” Our brother, nothing more. As there are four moments in our ecclesiastical history when we are reduced to our common

humanity and to our absolute similarity ; so there is one moment in our civic history, and that moment is to-night, perhaps the only time in our life, when we are absolutely on an equality with the greatest in the land. This is why in that old theocracy every man who was numbered in the census had to pay a tribute to the Tabernacle. When nothing is left except our common humanity, surely then we must make our common confession, "All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." You may be a duke. You may be an Oxford graduate. You may be a millionaire. But all these are superficial distinctions. At bottom you are a sinful man needing the mercy of God as much as the rest of us. Therefore, when for one moment all social, artificial distinctions ceased, each man paid his half-shekel to the Tabernacle as an acknowledgment of his obligation to sue for the mercy of Heaven and to do the will of God. This explains that remarkable incident which I read as a lesson. What a strange thing it was that Jesus Christ should have had that conversation with Peter ; that He should have hesitated to pay temple tribute ; and that He should do what He had never done before and never repeated!¹ Why did Christ object to pay the tribute which Peter declared He would pay ? It was not the Roman tribute, or Christ would have carried out His principle of paying to Cæsar what was due to him. It was the half-shekel which had gradually become an annual payment. Now, that payment was made by man as man, because he was a sinner in the sight of God ; and when he was reminded of his humanity he must be reminded of his need of Divine mercy. But Jesus Christ

¹ Matt. xvii. 24-29.

was not a sinful man, and, therefore, He was free. He was not under the moral obligation under which the rest of His countrymen were. He needed no ransom. His hesitation to pay the tax was due to the fact that He was not involved in the original obligation. There was no sin in Him. And yet, partly to prevent misrepresentation and partly to save Peter who had committed himself in the matter, Christ paid the tribute.

Now, when you fill up your census-paper to-morrow morning, or when your name is inserted in a census-paper which somebody else has to fill, remember its religious aspect. Remember that you are a sinful being before you are anything else, and more than you are anything else. You will be entered in that record every one of you to-night, but you will be entered simply as a man or woman or a child ; and as a human being you need the mercy of God as much as I do. You will not be numbered as rich or poor, as wise or ignorant, as famous or unknown, but simply as a human being, with all a human being's awful capacity of creating for yourself a heaven or a hell. What tremendous possibilities of happiness or misery are wrapped up in the totality of your being ! Oh ! my fellow-mortals, do you not realize the necessity of paying the half-shekel, of ransoming your soul ? Are you not conscious of your need of the mercy of God ? If not, I might as well talk to that wall as to you. Dwelling the other day upon some of the learned and plausible attacks made upon Christianity, I thought how absolutely useless it was to argue with anybody who was not conscious of sin. What an amount of paper and ink zealous Christian apologists have wasted in trying to persuade men who were morally unable to comprehend them ! Christ said, "I am not come to call the righteous,

but sinners to repentance." If you can do for yourself—very well. If your attitude is that of the prodigal son ; if you wish to go your own way ; if you are self-centred ; if you are, in the terrible language of Byron, "lord of yourself"—for the present it is useless to argue with you. You cannot understand me, and I can scarcely understand you. It is more than a quarter of a century since I was in that state of mind, and, perhaps, I did not grasp it then. My memory of that time tells me I had an aching void I could never fill. But I am scarcely in a position to put myself in the place of a man who is self-righteous and willing to take the actual burden of his life upon his own shoulders. There is a great gulf between you and me. But if the time should ever come, after illness or disappointment, or some great joy, when your eyes are opened, and you realize the solemn fact which was emphasized by the method of taking the Jewish census ; when you may cry out with S. Augustine, "O God, we were created for Thee, and we have no rest until we come to Thee ;" when you believe the most profound proverb of my native country, "Without God, without anything ; God, and enough!"—then I think I shall know something to your advantage, and I should long to have a conversation with you. I know something that will suit you exactly when you come to realize that you are a sinner, and are conscious of your ignorance and misery. But until then it is useless to argue. There may, however, be some in this Hall who have come to themselves and whose eyes are open now. To each of them I would say, My friend, this census which will be taken to-night is a very solemn and awful reminder that if a man should gain the whole world and lose his own soul it will profit him nothing. For most assuredly when the last record that the State will ever take of you is made

and some registrar of deaths carelessly enters your name, and writes that you died on such a day in such a place, then, indeed, all your artificial "clothes," to use the Carlylean phrase, will be taken from you. Stripped of these distinctions, you will stand a naked man, as you were at your birth, face to face with God, to give an account of the deeds done in the body. You would find it very difficult to avoid being entered in the census to-night if you tried. Even in a large community like this the meshes of the net are so small that few will escape, however much they might desire that. But although it is conceivable that some one may escape this census, there is a certain registrar-general of God named Death, whom no one has ever yet been known to escape. When he sets out to find you, and to present you before God as a human being, there is no place in this city where you can hide. Think of that, and think of that now.

There is one other thought, and that a much brighter and more delightful one, which is expressed in our census, and which was equally conspicuous in the Jewish census. That is, the solidarity of our interests. When you look over the census-paper, you will find a great many questions which will not benefit you, but they will benefit your neighbour. Why all these questions, now for the first time introduced, about employers and employees, about physical defects, and about the number of rooms you occupy at home? Because it is a most solemn fact that we are all bound together in the bundle of life. No man liveth to himself. If one part of the body-politic is sick, the whole is prejudicially affected. It is impossible for the rich and privileged to isolate themselves. If there is a disease in Whitechapel, it will find its way to Belgravia. If there is

misery anywhere, it will smite the greatest as well as the poorest. The Comtist theory of a body, of a living organism, is very ancient. It was exceedingly prominent in the teaching of S. Paul. But the Comtist body had no head. Christ is our Head. All humanity is one great organism, one colossal man, as Pascal said, of whom Christ is the Head. No one can say, "I am so insignificant it does not matter whether I go to the devil or not." It matters unspeakably and incalculably. Nothing is more awful than the extent of the mischief which the most degraded person may do to multitudes. Some who are very low can drag down those who are very high. Our powers of good and evil are immeasurable and eternal. I pray you, whoever you are, to have mercy upon yourself, and also to have mercy upon me and upon all humanity. We are so bound together in the closely-knit bundle of life that many yet unborn must be influenced by the decision you reach to-night. You young men and young women, it may seem to you that you are insignificant and unknown, but I tell you that the decision you make to-night will influence ages to come. I appeal to you most solemnly—for your own sake and for the sake of thousands who, directly and indirectly, are affected by you, mark the signs of the times, recognize the significance of the census to-night, and humble yourself before God.

Lastly, there is one feature of the census which is specially encouraging. While, in one sense, the census may be said to drag down the important and famous and privileged, it may in another sense be said, and be better said, to lift everybody up. A beautiful feature of it is the fact that nobody in all the six millions of London will be left out because he is too poor or too wicked. You notice how in the Jewish census they left all the women and all

the children out. But what an advance since then! We now include, not only all women and all children, but all outcasts. I suppose the police are instructed to find those who are sleeping out of doors. Nobody is so poor, no tramp so despicable and worthless, that the officials of the Government would pass him by unnumbered. When Jesus Christ shed His blood on Calvary it was shed for every one of us. The poorest, the most ignorant, the most worthless, those who apparently have no friends, are all dear to God. The most unhappy woman who walks the lowest street of London to-night is as dear to God as the Queen of England. The most worthless felon in a convict prison is as dear to God as the Archbishop of Canterbury. We do not believe that yet; we do not yet act upon that fact. However, the blessed sense of our common humanity is growing apace and is making revolutions everywhere. You may think that some of us who are sitting on this platform and are called to conspicuous office in the Christian Church, are more important than you and have easier access to God. But it is not so. It is difficult to have an audience with our Queen. I am told, however, that there are certain days when anybody may walk into the White House at Washington, and shake hands with the President of the United States. The habits of a democratic community are not favourable to class distinctions. The American custom represents better than our English custom the fact that every man has freedom of access to Jesus Christ. It is a great mercy that there are no ecclesiastical officials whose permission you have to gain before you can see Christ. Judging by ecclesiastical history, some of us would have a poor chance in that case. But when Jesus, the Son of God, died on the Cross, the veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom, to signify that

from that hour all men might come straight to God. No one stands, and no one can stand, between you and Christ. I am sure of that, for I myself came straight to Christ. We are all equally dear to God. He is able and willing to save every one of us to-night. May we all accept His mercy now !

THE DECISIVE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

“Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny :
Yea, with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

“Rather the earth shall doubt when her retrieving
Pours in the rain and rushes from the sod,
Rather than he for whom the great conceiving
Stirs in his soul to quicken unto God.

“Ay, tho' thou then shouldst strike him from his glory,
Blind and tormented, maddened and alone,
Even on the cross would he maintain his story
Yes, and in hell would whisper, ‘I have known.’ ”

F. W. H. MYERS.

THE DECISIVE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

"Until the day dawn, and the Day-star arise in your hearts."—
2 PET. i. 19.

FOR the last three Sunday afternoons I have examined the real ground of a Christian man's faith ; and I have specially referred you to the book which Dr. Dale has recently published, entitled "The Living Christ and the Four Gospels." There is no more timely or interesting book for the thoughtful young men and young women of our own time. In that book, as I have explained, Dr. Dale points out that the scientific and critical attack upon Christianity has produced no appreciable effect upon those who are Christians. He admits that it has created in the minds of non-Christians many apparently insuperable difficulties. But so far as we Christians are concerned the attack has been going on for half a century, and it has had no influence upon us whatever. As Dr. Dale says, that is not due to the fact that Christians are all fools who know nothing and are unable to appreciate scientific and critical difficulties. We have in our ranks men of scientific and literary culture equal to any on the other side. But the real reason why these attacks fall powerless is the fact that whatever

may have been the original grounds of our faith, that faith has been verified in our personal experience. Our faith in Christianity has not been manufactured by argumentative efforts, but is a matter of personal consciousness. Dr. Dale names six separate particulars of personal consciousness, which, so far as Christians are concerned, are entirely beyond the reach of critical or scientific attack. (1) There are multitudes of us who have experienced the power of Jesus Christ to deliver instantaneously from an evil habit. These cases are very striking, and are worthy of the careful attention of everybody who professes to be scientific. There are men in this Hall now who have been suddenly delivered from the power of drunkenness. The yoke was broken in a moment, and it has never been upon their shoulders since. Others have been delivered from swearing, lust, gambling, greed, and bad temper. Now, you might argue for ever, but no argument could affect their consciousness that in a moment, in response to a cry to Christ, they were so delivered. (2) In numerous other cases the deliverance has been gradual, but none the less real. (3) In the third place, there are many who have been delivered from an intolerable sense of guilt. Their experience is expressed in lines of which at the time of my conversion I was very fond—

“ Thy sins are forgiven, accepted thou art ;
I listened, and heaven sprang up in my heart.”

- (4) In the fourth place, the Christian man has a consciousness that he “has passed into the Divine and eternal order.” He looks no longer at the things which are seen and temporal, but at those which are unseen and eternal.
- (5) Again, he has a positive consciousness of fellowship with Jesus Christ, and he is as certain of that as he is at

summer noonday that he is basking in the sunlight. (6) Lastly, he is conscious of life not only *through* Christ, but *in* Christ, to Whom he bears the same relationship (not metaphorically, but really) as the branch bears to the vine. As a simple psychological fact he can say, "I live, and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." Now, as Dr. Dale shows, such faith in Christ "rests upon foundations which lie far beyond the reach of scientific and historical criticism." It is not because we are ignorant or indifferent to such criticism that it produces no effect, but because the foundations of our faith are such that they are beyond discussion.

When we say that, we are of course exposed to the objection that these experiences are the "creation of a fevered brain," that they are hallucinations, subjective delusions, for which we are, perhaps, to be more pitied than blamed. But there is a very awkward fact for those who would in this easy way get rid of my experience—the fact that it is shared by so many other people. It would be easy enough to believe that I am deluded, that I am the victim of some strange monomania. But if so, I am a monomaniac in very interesting and desirable company. I go back two thousand years. I read the New Testament, and I find every Christian described in this book had the same experience. I go all through the nineteen centuries of Christian history, and from a thousand Christian biographers I learn that in this respect the best and healthiest representatives of all Christian communions, however widely they differ on theological or ecclesiastical questions, are absolutely agreed. To come into the modern period, and to take only two most conspicuous names, the names of the two men who have influenced modern Britain more than any others—

Wesley in England and Chalmers in Scotland. Now, the lives of these men are written in large characters, which he who runs may read. The wayfaring man, though a fool, can scarcely miss the significance of their lives. We are familiar with what took place in this city a hundred and fifty years ago, when John Wesley suddenly realized that his sins were blotted out for Christ's sake. Then began that great religious movement which made modern England politically and socially as well as spiritually, as all competent authorities now admit. If you cross the Tweed the case of Thomas Chalmers is, if possible, even more striking. For Thomas Chalmers was in the front rank of the theologians, scholars, political economists, and orators of Scotland before his evangelical conversion, before he entered into the conscious enjoyment of salvation described in Dr. Dale's book. That change in Thomas Chalmers revolutionized Scotland. It was the cause of the disruption of the Scotch Church, when the flower of Scotch clergy abandoned their livings and their homes rather than submit to the tyranny of the State. So long as these ministers did not enjoy peace with God they might submit to political servitude. But the man who can say, "My God, I am Thine," is not the sort of man to have his religion dictated to him. The result of the conversion of Chalmers was that Scotland was raised to a higher spiritual level. One of the most glorious moments in the history of the Universal Church was when the Scotch clergy forsook everything for Jesus Christ and made modern Scotland. You cannot get rid of these things by saying that Thomas Chalmers was a monomaniac and John Wesley a fool. If you do I shall be glad to be placed in the same category. But we have plenty of witnesses still living. As I have often reminded

you, there is no more striking evidence of this than our services at St. James's Hall. Ministers and laymen of all Christian Churches come here every Sunday. I see a distinguished minister of a Church in New York in the congregation now. If some one under conviction of sin went into the inquiry-room behind this platform I should have no scruple in asking my new American acquaintance to go and talk to him. He would give to the man under conviction precisely the same advice as Mr. Nix or I would. Do you not see that, in such circumstances, there could be no collusion? I and Mr. Nix and a few other cunning people might get up a conspiracy and invent something; and then having agreed beforehand exactly what we would say, we could tell an apparently consistent story. But I have no opportunity of making arrangements of that kind with Christians in all lands. The thing is too absurd. No one could suspect that, for it is impossible. And yet, although we differ on many points, men and women coming from all parts of the world find themselves in absolute agreement about this one glorious fact—the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sin. We know it is a Fact, because He has forgiven ours. And the number of witnesses is ever increasing. While you were examining witnesses we should be manufacturing many more. We have never had a Sunday of services without conviction of sin and conversions. Every Sunday men and women are converted. Many of them are sitting in this Hall now. I can see it in their twinkling eyes all over the building.

“The witness in himself he hath,
And consciously believes.”

It is all summed up in words I have often quoted—

“What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell.”

But to-day I wish to meet one more objection which has, no doubt, occurred to some of you. When we speak of our Christian experience, somebody will say, as Dr. Dale anticipates, that the adherents of false religions can make the same appeal to consciousness ; that Mohammedans, for instance, enjoy a similar experience. It is a curious thing that when I did mention Christian experience in *The Times* some one at once wrote in reply that the Mahdi's followers had the same experience. Nothing is easier than to say that, or to write a letter to *The Times* asserting that ; but let these gentlemen produce their Mahdist witnesses for cross-examination. My absolute conviction is that no false religionist ever professed to have such an experience as ours. Nothing is easier than for an Englishman to imagine what their experience is. But how do you prove it ? Produce your Indian ; produce your Mohammedan. It is astonishing how different evidence is under cross-examination. You and I know exactly what Christian experience is. But it is impossible to argue that a Mohammedan has the same experience that we have. There is no proof of it at all. At any rate, I refuse to believe it until the Mohammedan appears in person. I am convinced that when he does come his experience will amount at best to this—a deep and placid conviction of the one great tenet of the Mohammedan faith that “Allah is Allah,” a conviction, that is, of the unity and omnipotence of God ; and that we Christians believe as well as he. There his experience and ours agree. But it is a very defective and inadequate experience. It realizes only one aspect of the Divine nature. It is true that, having this deep conviction that there is only

one God, the honest Mohammedan may proceed to infer that as Mahomet taught him so great a truth, Mahomet must have been a prophet of God. I should not care to argue the point with respect to that one great truth. But if he argued that because Mahomet was right on that issue he was right in everything he wrote in the Koran, I should say it does not follow in the least. Moreover, the Christian consciousness does not witness to a truth, but to a living Person, which is quite a different thing. The Mohammedan might be convinced that there is only one God. But that is an abstract truth. The Christian does not testify to an abstract truth, but to the presence and influence of a living Person, to the actual impact of that Person upon his life. Yes, to a personal union with that Person. I have already quoted the words of S. Paul, "Christ liveth in me." No Mohammedan ever said, "Mahomet liveth in me." That sort of idea never occurred to a Hindu or a Chinaman, or a native of Japan, or a savage in Africa. As Sir Monier Williams says, the idea of personal union with our God is distinctive and unique. You have no trace of it in the ancient religions of Asia. Remember that this particular consciousness is not an inference *from* experience, but is given *in* experience. Otherwise there would be room for error in the deductions we make. But it is a conscious fellowship with the living Christ. It is more intimate, more unbroken, more abiding than any union I can ever have with any other person. To the intelligent and properly instructed Christian, Christianity is Christ. Hence the decisive evidence of Christianity—mark it well—is my personal consciousness that Christ lives in me and I in Him. It does not matter how the books of Moses assumed their present shape, or whether the Book of Isaiah was wholly written by that prophet or no. All these

are very interesting and important, but they do not touch the vital essence of the Christian faith. Of the essential fact to which I have referred the Holy Communion is the sign and pledge. Have you ever been struck by the circumstance that such a religion as ours, which is so spiritual and which has renounced outward signs, should still retain this particular symbolism? Surely the object is to drag into eternal prominence the central truth, the fundamental experience of the Christian faith. As my colleague and I went over this Hall this morning, distributing the elements to our fellow-Christians, what did we say? —“The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on Him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.” And then we said, “The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ’s Blood was shed for thee, and be thankful.” And they ate the bread and drank the wine to signify that as they assimilated these with the tissues of their bodies, so, mystically and spiritually, the body and blood of Jesus Christ were communicated to them. Christ lives in us and we live in Him. There is nothing even remotely resembling this in Mohammedanism or Hinduism, or any false religion. It signifies an inner, conscious, personal experience, a blessed “fellowship,” which puts the reality of our faith beyond all criticism and all possibility of doubt.

And now, in conclusion, let me show how all this is confirmed by the Apostle Peter. Turn to the passage which I read as the lesson. It is a very remarkable one. “We,” said S. Peter, “did not follow cunningly devised fables

when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (or, as it is better rendered in the margin, "the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ"), "but we were witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; and this voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven when we were with Him in the holy mount." S. Peter looks back to the Mount of Transfiguration when Christ was transfigured before him, and when he made the fatal mistake of supposing that either Moses or Elijah would be necessary when Christ was there. "We have the word of prophecy made more sure." In other words, that great revelation of Jesus Christ confirmed for Peter the former revelations which were made in relation to Jesus Christ. It was when Peter began to enjoy the conscious salvation of which I have been speaking that he said, "We have the word of prophecy made more sure." I am reminded of an eminent member of one of our Universities who wrote a commentary on Isaiah. During the period he wrote the first part he was without this personal consciousness of salvation, and although the scholarship was faultless, there was a coldness about it which every evangelical Christian noticed. My distinguished friend Dr. Moulton told me that when the second volume appeared he was perfectly amazed. There was a warmth, an evangelical fervour, of which he had seen no trace in the first volume. The fact is, that in the interval the great scholar had been converted; and when he experienced that change, of course he saw the evangelical prophet with other eyes. The prophecy was made plain by that experience, "Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in

a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Day-star arise in your hearts." Study your Bible, especially your New Testament, until the "day dawn and the Day-star," the herald of the dawn, "arise in your hearts." In other words, study the Bible until your own personal experience floods your soul with the morning glow, until you are full of light, until the "Day-star arise in your hearts." Go on studying your Bible until you understand it because you have had that living experience without which you cannot understand it properly. The Bible does not attempt to prove the existence of God. It takes it for granted. I know myself that every stage in the growth of my own spiritual experience has been the outcome of a better understanding of the Bible. Some parts of this book which were Egyptian darkness to me are beautifully luminous now. I have that inner personal experience which enables me to interpret the meaning of the Word of God ; for, after all, these things are "spiritually discerned." I cannot close this series of Conferences better than by quoting the well-known verse which explains the great change that we may all experience, and which illustrates it from an incident in the life of S. Peter. That verse expresses the decisive experience of millions, and explains why no advance either of Science or of the Higher Criticism can ever shake their faith in Christ :—

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night ;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray :
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light ;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."

THE CHRISTIAN TRIUMPH.

“Surely He cometh, and a thousand voices
Shout to the saints and to the deaf and dumb ;
Surely He cometh, and the earth rejoices,
Glad for His coming who hath sworn, I come.”

F. W. H. MYERS.



THE CHRISTIAN TRIUMPH.

“ Be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.”—JOHN xvi. 33.

THESE are the last words of instruction and counsel and encouragement which our Lord spoke to the disciples before His mortal agony began. What did he mean by “the world”? Certainly He did not mean this earth on which we tread. He had no occasion to overcome that. That was absolutely subject to His sway. “The very winds and waves,” the most turbulent and intractable of forces, obeyed His voice at once. This beautiful world is His, radiant with His presence, tremulous with His breath. Neither did He mean the human race as a whole, for that “world” He loved so well that He gave up His life for it.

By the “world” in this and all similar passages He meant human society so far as it is organized on an anti-Christian, that is to say, a selfish basis. He came to this earth in order to substitute Brotherliness for Egotism. That was his Social Gospel. But when He came Egotism was supreme both in the State and in the Individual. Selfishness was the basis of life. That is the very essence of worldliness, and that still continues to be the basis of anti-Christian society.

When the first Whitechapel murder took place a working man explained the fact that such an outrage could be perpetrated in the midst of a crowded neighbourhood without discovery, by using the following significant terms : “It’s every one for hisself here.” He meant that every one living in that district was so selfish and so preoccupied with his own affairs and own interest that he took no trouble to notice anything out of the common, to listen to a woman’s screams or to pursue a murderer.

But this conviction that Society is founded upon selfishness is not peculiar to East End costermongers. It was recently expressed in memorable words on the judicial bench by one of the most enlightened of our judges. He went so far as to say that if any man appeared before him in the witness-box and asserted that his master-motive was not selfishness, he would not believe that witness on his oath, so deeply convinced is that clever man of the world that selfishness is the basis of life. Indeed, it is commonly assumed as self-evident by many who write on social questions that “enlightened self-interest” is the ultimate motive of conduct.

The devil was the original political economist of that school. He appeared long ages ago in the drama of Job, arguing that “skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.”¹ The drama of Job was written to refute that blasphemous lie, and men are at last beginning to realize how gigantic and mischievous a lie it is. The example and the influence of Jesus Christ are gradually undermining the very foundations upon which the Satanic doctrine rests. Mr. Herbert Spencer, the greatest of all non-Christian scientific students of Society, announces in the “Data of Ethics” that

¹ Job ii. 4.

human society is so constituted that no man can really achieve his own happiness except by seeking the happiness of his neighbour ; that Altruism, not Egotism, is the real motive of a healthy and successful life.

Mazzini, again, the most philosophic of religious statesmen, has asserted in glorious language that there are no antagonistic national interests ; that the principle of brotherliness is as applicable to national relations as to private life ; and that neither men nor peoples can achieve their real welfare by yielding to selfishness.

Indeed, this great social truth has made far wider progress in the convictions of mankind than is commonly realized. When a Father Damien in his unselfishness becomes a leper and dies a leper for the sake of saving lepers, the whole world thrills with emotion. When General Booth in his old age conceives the vision of a magnificent plan for abolishing pauperism, it is received with admiration and gratitude in the most unexpected quarters.

Whatever power of persecution the "world" as I have now defined it, still retains, is mere child's play in comparison with the tortures experienced by the eleven men to whom the text was first uttered. "In the world," said Christ, "ye shall have persecution." Yes ! assuredly, they would be despised, rejected, starved, exiled, imprisoned, scourged, and, with one exception, all of them put to a cruel and ignominious death. But the temper of the world is not changed. The awful words of S. John are still true, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."¹ And let us never forget what worldliness is. One of the most stupid and mischievous delusions that ever took possession of evangelical Christians is the eccentric idea

¹ 1 John ii. 15.

that worldliness consists in dancing, card-playing, and going to the theatre ! Whereas I have known many men and women who have never indulged in either of these controverted amusements and yet have been intensely and utterly worldly to their heart's core. The essence of worldliness is not the indulgence in particular amusements, but selfishness—selfishness which may take a gross or a refined shape, which may be vulgar or artistic, stupid or highly intellectual. But its essence is always the same ; and the very moment you accept Christ as your Saviour and Example the world declares war against you, for you have become its deadliest foe. You have rejected the very foundation upon which it rests all its hopes ; and the world would persecute you as it persecuted Christ and His disciples if it were as strong to-day as it was then. Between real Christians and the world there is inevitable and irreconcilable war. Listen to the stern words of Christ : “ I am come to send not peace, but a sword.” Between Christianity and the world no compromise is possible. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot at the same time obey what is called “ enlightened self-interest ” and the principles of Christ. Every Christian must accept the implacable hatred and the fierce opposition of the world. But to every Christian Christ exclaims, “ Be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world ;” and we are to be of good cheer, because what Christ has done we can do, or rather, to speak quite correctly, He can do in us. What is the secret of victory over the world ? Christ overcame the world. How ? That is the great question, and to that question we must give a threefold answer.

In the first place, He overcame the world by not fearing its wrath. He “ counted the cost ” and cheerfully braved

the worst. Listen to His words: "I say unto you My friends, Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."¹

Aristotle said that "courage" consisted in being afraid of the right person; and if your courage fails, remember that it is much less dreadful to excite the wrath of man than to excite the wrath of God. If the worst comes to the worst, the world will kill your body—that is all. Even the Nihilists of Russia are not afraid to die. That is why the vast might of the Czar trembles before them. The first condition of overcoming the world is fearlessness. As Lamenais said, "All that Christ asked of the world was a cross on which to die." Therefore He overcame the world. O, how rare, how precious, how irresistible is moral fearlessness! No man ever exerted so great an influence in any land as John Knox exerted in Scotland. You feel his presence to-day in every city and in every village of that great country. Why was Knox so mighty, so invincible? Because he "did not fear the face of man." Why should you fear anybody except God? Man can starve you, or kill you in some other way more expeditiously. But what is man? And what is death? Be of good cheer. The martyr's crown is worth something. "The light affliction we endure" now is but "for a moment," and is not worthy to be mentioned in comparison with the "weight of glory" reserved for us in heaven. But there is little probability that you will actually be required to die for Christ. Your worst probable fate will be poverty. For

¹ Luke xii. 4, 5.

the world does not bestow its gold upon such as you. But even then you will not be so poor as Christ was.

Secondly, Christ overcame the world by not courting its favour. He knew that a man's "life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Therefore He was quite indifferent to wealth and all that wealth could buy. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay His head. Satan offered Him all the wealth and pomp and glory of the world. But that temptation never stirred His blood. "What shall it profit a man," He said, "if he gain the whole world, and lose his true life?" He cared neither for money nor for fame. He made Himself of no reputation. The bribes of the world were to Him as impotent as its threats. He cared for the praise of God more than for the praise of man. He was incorruptible because He was absolutely disinterested. "The prince of this world cometh," said He, "and hath nothing in Me." The devil was utterly checkmated and undone because Christ at once rejected all his bribes. Happy the Christian who shares the disinterestedness of Christ.

"This man is freed from servile bands
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall ;
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all."

But there was one other quality by which Christ overcame the world. He overcame it, thirdly, by loving it, and so loving it that He died for it. When the world crucified Him He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." That is what distinguished Him from the Stoic and Cynic of antiquity, and from the Pessimist and the Nihilist of our own day. He did not

despise men like the Cynic and the Nihilist, and He did not despair of men like the Stoic and the Pessimist. The root of His indifference was not pride but humility. He overcame evil by good ; and He overcame not merely to the extent of saving Himself, but to the extent of saving the world. Many might accompany me while I speak of not fearing the world and not courting its favour. But the great test is the third quality by which Christ overcame the world—His passionate, divine love for it. Cynics and Pessimists talk much about resisting both the bribes and the threats of the world. But they are immeasurably inferior to Christ, because they do not love the world. They never have overcome the world, and they never can overcome it ; because the supreme condition of overcoming it is all-victorious love.

Your great work, O Christian, is not to save your own soul, but to overcome the world as Christ overcame it : to overcome it by loving it, and ultimately saving it. How ? “With man it is impossible. But with God all things are possible.” Repent of your selfishness. Trust Christ with all your heart. Christ will, by His Spirit, live in you, reproduce His own life in you, and make you what you never can be either by merit or by effort. “In Me,” He said, and the phrase is pregnant with vital significance—“in Me,” in living union with Me, like the union of the branch and the vine, like the union of the members and the body, “ye may have peace.” The peace not of pride nor of despair, but of disinterested and triumphant love.

Let us renounce all laziness and all cowardice. Let us never again yield to the subtle and deadly charms of selfishness. Let us in the strength of God overcome the “world” which flourishes upon the damnation of the

young, the ignorant, the helpless, the friendless. It is time that all this devilry should cease; and that the ears of a tender-hearted God should no longer be filled, morning, noon, and night, with cries of agony and despair. It is time that human society should be reconstructed on a Christian basis, that brotherliness should take the place of selfishness, and that the kingdom of Jesus Christ should be established in every land and in every heart. Let us lay aside all forms of Satanic selfishness. Let us put on the whole armour of God. Let us fight against the “world” with the utmost energy of our nature. To cheer us in the conflict, the Son of God reminds us that He too has fought and won upon the same glorious field of strife. And He gives us the inspiring promise, “To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Me in My throne.” Yes! that shall be our sufficient and our eternal reward, the greatest which God Himself could bestow—we shall be for ever with Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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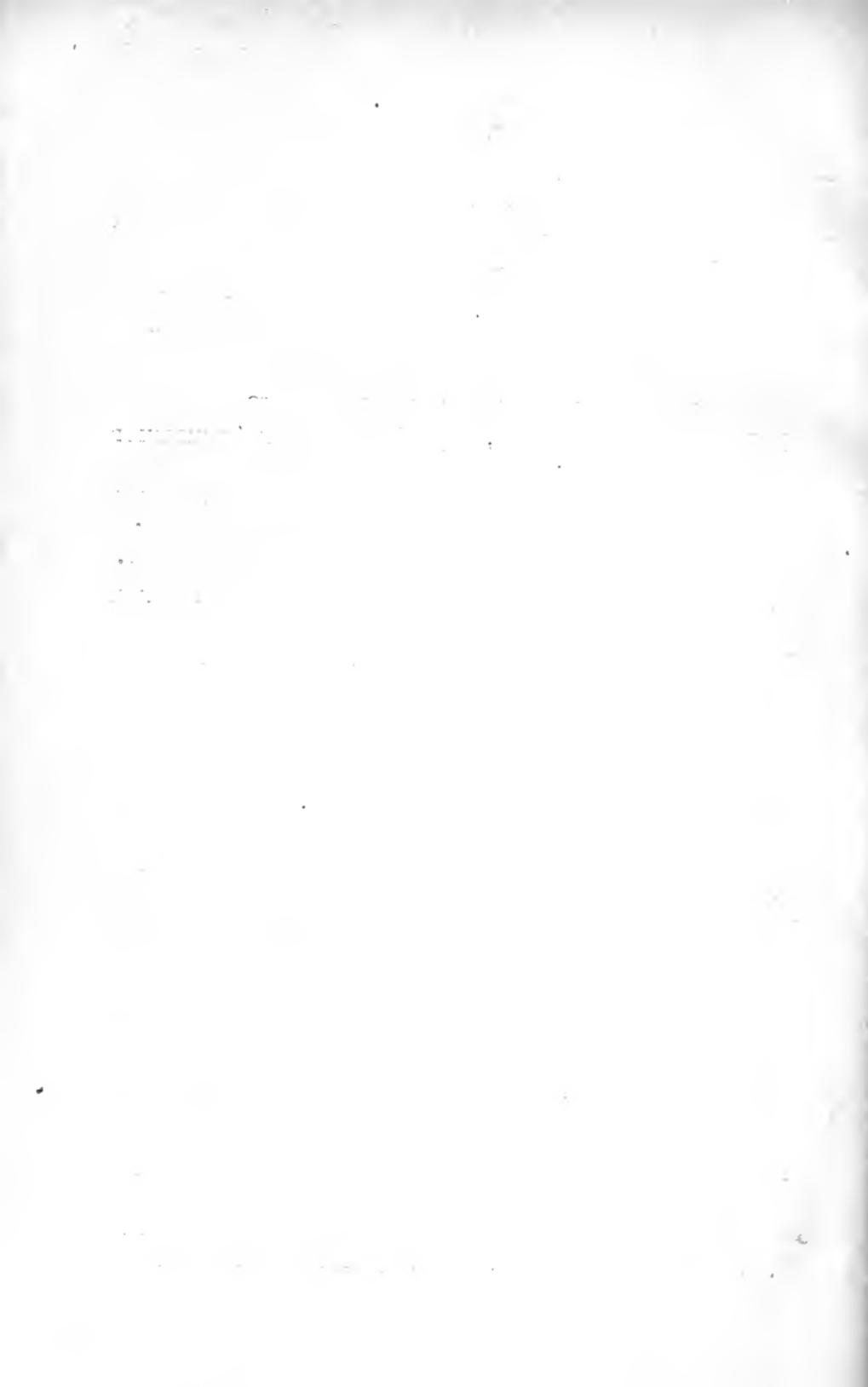
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